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The Last Place They Thought Of: Black Podcasts and the Performance of Marginalization

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The Last Place They Thought Of: Black Podcasts and the Performance of Marginalization

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Nikeeta Slade, co-host of the *QueerWOC* podcast. Your brilliance will be sorely missed.

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else instead of time with them. My computer is constantly open. My son has taken to checking in with me and asking about my progress. It motivates me because he is watching. He also knows that this is the thing that stands between us playing together, so he wants me to finish as fast as possible. It is important to me that I finish this degree because I know it will forever change the trajectory of their lives. I want them to know that Mommy worked extremely hard to make her dreams happen while also still trying to be the best mom that I can be. I hope they believe that the sacrifice was worth it.

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Street, girl of the South Side of Chicago, will soon be a doctor. Won't you celebrate with me?

Abstract

The Last Place They Thought Of: Black Podcasts and the Performance of Marginality

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This project argues that Blackness is cultivated and performed within the podcast space through the use of Black vernaculars, Black cultural references and the centering of the needs and interests of various Black communities. As a result, podcasts provide a space for the production of a Black sound imaginary, that makes room for the contestation, development and maintenance of the sounds of Black identities. As a medium with unstructured formats and little time restraints, podcasts are not only well-suited for intimate conversations but this kind of performance of difference and marginality.

My project looks at how Blackness is negotiated and performed within a group of podcasts primarily hosted by Black and queer women such as womanist pop culture-themed *Tea with Queen & J* (2014-present), Black feminist political podcast *The Black Joy Mixtape* (2016-2018), and Black trans-hosted *Marsha's Plate* (2016-present). The dissertation uses textual analysis and case studies, along with participant observation, to examine how Black identity is positioned. Using episodes that focus on the brands and identity of Black podcasters, I grapple with what is meant by a 'Black podcast'--the meaning of the label for the podcast and for the hosts. On a platform that is mainly auditory, how do podcasters signal their own Black and intersecting identities?

Next, I use Black feminist case studies to interrogate how Black feminism is performed on podcasts. Within these podcasts, I examine themes of storytelling, community and language, which are crucial elements of the Black feminist standpoints espoused by the podcast hosts and guests. One of the case studies involves several podcasts' responses to the *Surviving R.Kelly* (2019) docuseries as they not only hold Black legacy media accountable for the silence around Kelly's abusive behavior, but more importantly, modeling that accountability by interrogating and disrupting their own complicity. Another case study looks at three episodes of *The Black Joy Mixtape* to explore the Black feminist principles espoused in the episodes, including the storytelling

of a Black woman's abortion, and the sexual assault of one of the hosts in the context of #MeToo. Together, these case studies push forward a Black feminist sonic argument that centers the voices and experiences of Black and queer women.

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Introduction: Podcasts In Color

I stumbled upon podcasts in a time of desperation. It was 2016, the first year of my PhD program. Due to the ever-increasing cost of living in the city where I went to graduate school, I decided not to live near the university and instead, lived somewhat halfway between my university and my husband's place of employment. So this meant that on a good day, my commute one way was over an hour. When I first began this commute, I would listen to music or call friends to catch up. Truthfully, I was desperately lonely. Not only did I not live in the city where I spent the majority of my time, but it was also a heavily gentrifying city with a rapidly declining Black population. Some days I would only see one or two Black faces that look like mine. It was an extremely isolating experience.

On a particularly rough day, I decided to try a podcast recommended to me by one of my friends. I couldn't bare to call anyone to complain about the things I'd been complaining about for years at that point. I had listened to all the music I could muster. I needed something different. Podcasts were definitely different for me--I had to Google how to listen to one. After a few minutes of struggling, the loud sounds of trap music came blaring through my speakers and I became addicted to my first podcast, *The Read* (Loud Speakers Network, 2013-).

This show was unlike anything I'd ever heard on the radio. Before podcasts, I hadn't listened to much talk radio. I found it to be boring and I hadn't found a show with -familiar to me. They sounded like people I knew--my friends, my cousins, people I grew

up with. They cursed, talked about pop culture and had accents that were soothing to me. Their voices filled my car and made it feel like I had a car full of my favorite people. At that point, I hadn't felt that way in a long time. I hadn't heard Black voices like that in such a long time. Crissle and Kid Fury felt like home to me, in a space that very much felt the opposite.

To my surprise, I stumbled upon more podcasts like *The Read*--hosted by Black people discussing all kinds of topics, all while shooting the breeze and sounding like a conversation that I could hear in someone's living room. Discovering these Black podcasts was a gamechanger for me--I would rush to my car after a long day of classes. It felt like I was meeting an old friend for drinks.

One day I noticed that a podcast I had grown fond of, which was hosted by a Black woman, featured a White woman as a guest. This struck me as an odd choice, particularly because the podcast not only primarily had guests of color, but the title and content of the show implied an intentional centering of the voices of people of color. So I decided to tweet the host of the show to ask why this sudden change in the show's direction. To my surprise (and subsequent disappointment), the host responded that she never intended for her show to be a "Black podcast" and that she had no plans of solely having guests of color.

I was crushed. This was a space that I had (mistakenly) thought of as one that centered guests of color. But this interaction caused me to sit back and really think through what a Black podcast is. Why was this such an important title? What is at stake in whether or not a Black person has to host a "Black" podcast, and what is the deeper

meaning behind the rejection of a Black identity for the show? These questions are the foundation of this research project. I am interested in thinking through what exactly constitutes a Black podcast. The above incident showed me that it is not enough to solely be a Black person hosting a podcast.

The research questions that guide this research include: How do Black podcasts perform and negotiate marginality and difference? How can Black podcasts shift our definition of marginalized media? The overall aim of this project is to explore how these podcasts shift what it means to make media on the margins.

DO YOU EVEN PODCAST, BRO?

Richard Berry (2006) describes podcasting as "a converged medium (bringing together audio, the web and portable media devices)" (p. 145). Podcasts, he continues, are "any audio content downloaded from the internet either manually from a website or automatically via software applications" (p. 145). Before the popularity of smartphones years later, however, listening to podcasts was limited to certain devices, which included computers and MP3 players, as they had to be downloaded and listened to offline. This of course limited the accessibility of podcasts.

In 2004, journalist Ben Hammersley is credited with creating the term 'podcasting'. Describing Internet radio (and podcasts), Hammersley states:

> by combining the intimacy of voice, the interactivity of weblog, and the convenience and portability of an MP3 download, [podcasting] seems to take the best of all worlds, and not just for the listener. The ability to broadcast out, and have the internet talk back to them...is very appealing to journalists, professional hack and weblogs alike.

He wisely continues, “Liberating the listeners from time and place, and allowing them to talk back to the programme makers is one thing: liberating the programme makers is even better. You can get away with a lot more on the Internet.” Even back then, he saw the unique features of the medium and the advantages it gave to both listeners and creators.

Although the “Golden Renaissance” of podcasting is said to have started around the debut and groundbreaking success of the *Serial* podcast (This American Life, *The New York Times,* 2014-), podcasts are not a new medium. Podcasts are digital audio files that can be downloaded and consumed on many devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, etc. They vary in length, genre and sound. There is, quite frankly, a podcast for everyone, due to the sheer number of active podcasts. There are currently over 2 million active podcasts on Apple Podcasts--active being defined as having episodes published within the last 90 days. On average, each day there are almost 6,000 new podcasts uploaded each day.

There are many factors that influenced the rise in popularity of podcasts, including the evolution of smartphones. Advances in smartphone technology made them not only more accessible but affordable, and in turn, made it easier to listen to podcasts as mobile media. Gone were the days of listening to podcasts offline, after having to download them first. When *Serial* debuted in 2014, it was the first podcast to reach five million iTunes downloads in a relatively short amount of time. *Serial* is said to have ushered in a “podcasting renaissance” of sorts, and significantly changed the way that podcasts were listened to and consumed.

There are obvious comparisons between podcasts and radio. Both are audio in nature and are listened to through a device. However, Berry (2015) points to distinct differences between the two mediums. Podcasts, he argues, appeal to listeners because it offers control of when and how to listen, taking the "live" aspect that is a staple of radio and putting it in the hands of the listener. Although podcasts are usually released on a set schedule--sometimes weekly--they can be listened to at the discretion of the listener, whether that is the day the episode is released or two years later. In addition to giving listeners more control, podcasting offers creators "the opportunity to explore topics, formats, durations, and approaches that would not normally find a home on broadcast radio" (Berry, 172). The freedom to stray from traditional norms, in turn, creates its own unique affordances, characteristics and norms for podcasts, which lends itself to being an attractive medium for those who have been marginalized within mainstream media.

Although podcasting can be a solitary act, community building and solidarity is often encouraged and developed between listeners and hosts. Podcasts help us make sense of ourselves and the world around us. Consider the following description of the relationships listeners cultivate from podcasts:

> To be a private, silent participant in other people's interests, conversations, lives and experiences, relating to a subject you are passionate about, generates a deep sense of connection. Perhaps such immersion into a simultaneously interior and exterior sonic experience may be the essential reason why podcasts have become so popular: they offer the listener a means to explore the self while simultaneously providing anchoring points in the chaos of a digital and material experience that is increasingly blurred (Llinares, et al., 2)

More importantly, listening in on conversations of other people's experiences and how they move through the world, can provide key tools in how we see ourselves as

marginalized subjects. Rekha Murthy, co-lead for Spotify's podcast bootcamp for aspiring female podcast hosts of color, said the following:

> I've learned more about the experiences and perspectives of people of color through podcasting than anywhere else. I've come to a better understanding and appreciation of my own identities as a woman, and as a woman of color, thanks to podcasts.

Murthy's statement reflects a key notion of this project, which is that as Black publics, Black podcasts are important spaces to hear varied perspectives, experiences and reactions to multiple Black experiences. In the next section, I'll discuss the ways that Blackness has been constructed and negotiated within podcasting.

'The Conversations That Black People Have, When White People Aren't In The Room'[1]

Shortly after I discovered *The Read* in 2016, I stumbled upon a fellow super-fan--Berry Sykes. I was delighted to know that not only were there more Black people who were just as obsessed with podcasts as I was, but Sykes was also the creator of the online directory Podcasts In Color. Sykes created the site in 2015 as a way to house a list of podcasts hosted by people of color. The site has now ballooned to hundreds of podcasts, divided into categories such as 'For the Culture' and 'Kiki's/Conversations with Friends.' Both categories use Black slang to signal that the shows in these categories are aligned with Black identities. These categories stand in stark contrast to categories like 'Health &

[1] This is a tagline from the podcast *For Colored Nerds*, a Black podcast hosted by Brittany Luse and Eric Eddings.

Fitness' and 'Leisure,' which are used to group podcasts within the ever-dominating Apple Podcasts platform.

The appeal for me of the Podcasts In Color platform is that it made discovering podcasts that not only interested me, but were more likely to center my identities, much easier, which has continued to fuel my love of podcasts. When scholar Sarah Florini (2015) interviewed Black podcaster Elon James White, he shared that a network told him that "Black people don't listen to podcasts." This statement was used to deter White from pursuing his own network of podcasts hosted by and catering to Black people. (He did so anyway, creating This Week in Blackness).

In 2015, scholar, activist and rapper Chenjerai Kumanyika caused a stir in the public radio and audio world when he questioned the prevalence of Whiteness in the public radio sphere in an essay for the *Transom Review*. Kumanyika wrote about his experiences recording an audio segment for the Transom Traveling Workshop on Catalina--while listening back, he didn't recognize the voice that he was using.

> As I read the script back to myself while editing, I realized that as I was speaking aloud I was also imagining someone else's voice saying my piece. The voice I was hearing and gradually beginning to imitate was something in between the voice of Roman Mars and Sarah Koenig. Those two very different voices have many complex and wonderful qualities. They also sound like white people. My natural voice —the voice that I most use when I am most comfortable — doesn't sound like that.
>
> Journalists of various ethnicities, genders and other identity categories intentionally or unintentionally internalize and "code-switch" to be consistent with culturally dominant "white" styles of speech and narration. As I wrote my script for my Transom workshop piece, I was struggling to imagine how my own voice would sound speaking those words. This is partially because I am an African-American male, a professor, and hip-hop artist whose voice has been shaped by black, cultural patterns of speech and oratory. I could easily imagine

> my more natural voice as an interviewee, or as the host of a news style podcast about “African-American issues,” or even a sports or hip-hop podcast...But in my mind’s ear, it was harder to hear my voice, that is to say my type of voice, as the narrator of the specific kind of narrative, non-fiction radio piece that I was making.

It is not surprising that Kumanyika struggled to imagine his natural voice as part of a public radio show. Public radio has its own distinct styles, norms and patterns. We might not be able to describe it, but we know it when we hear it. It’s part of the reason why I was so opposed to listening to podcasts for so long--like Kumanyika, it was hard for me to imagine hearing someone who sounded like me and ultimately appeal to me. In an NPR blog, writer Liana Van Nostrand acknowledges that the ‘NPR voice’ is a thing:

> What comes to mind when you imagine an "NPR voice"? You might hear the rich baritone of Bob Edwards. You might think of Terry Gross' velvety timbre. Or you might hear the hushed monotone parodied in *Saturday Night Live*'s iconic "Schweddy Balls" sketch. Whatever you think of, you're not alone: Many listeners have an idea of what an NPR voice should sound like. And when reporters and hosts deviate from that supposed standard, our office hears about it.

When Elon James White was told that “Black people don’t listen to podcasts,” there was a lot being said within that statement. For one, Black people might not have listened to podcasts because they were not the proposed ideal audience. When discussing the Whiteness of public radio, Kumanyika uses podcasts and public radio interchangeably (and understandably). His article came out in 2015, on the cusp of the so-called Podcast Golden Age, and podcasting was still indeed, so White. In 2016, Quartz.com writer Josh Morgan conducted an informal study of over 1,000 podcasts and unsurprisingly found that over 85% of podcasts had at least one White host, and 66% of these podcasts had at least one White male host.

Like much of technology and social media platforms, there is an element of 'surprise' at the ways that Black people use technology. Inherent in this surprise are racist beliefs about who tech is designed and imagined for (Brock, 2012). Podcasts are no different, hence White being told that Black folks don't listen to podcasts. But, we do, in fact, listen to podcasts. Outside of Latinx populations, we are the fastest growing listener group of podcasts, with 5x growth to over 4 million listeners in 2019. 41% of podcast listeners are non-White, which is higher than the actual non-White U.S. population. This means that podcast listeners are racially diverse, and these numbers will only continue to increase over the years as podcasts continue to increase in popularity.

These podcast listener stats are informative, but are also telling of the ways that Whiteness is still dominant and marked while also simultaneously unmarked (Dyer, 1995). All non-White racial groups get lumped into one category (including 'Other', which is not specified as to who belongs to this category, and perpetuates the symbolic annihilation of indigenous tribes), as if to say that non-White listeners are subset listeners and the *real* listeners are White. The "traditional" podcast listener has been identified as affluent, highly educated, male and White (Edison Research; Morris and Patterson, 2015).

But similar to social media platforms like Twitter, Vine and blogs, the supposed "ideal White user" excludes so many other groups who are indeed using these platforms in unique and culturally specific ways. In 2014, when a Ferguson, MO White police officer fatally shot an unarmed, Black 18-year-old named Michael Brown, Twitter helped amplify the stories of those witnessing his body lying in the street for hours, and captured

the subsequent protests and riots that occurred in the city and around the world. Years later, social media continues to be key formats in amplifying this particular cultural moment that we are in-the supposed "postracial" era during the Obama presidential administration and the domestic terror-laden years of the Trump administration. Social media users skillfully used the platforms to challenge systemic oppression, to livetweet shows and to even document the insurrection at the Capitol in January 2021.

Podcasts, however, have a unique position among social media platforms. In-depth, nuanced conversations can be difficult on say, Twitter or Instagram. While these platforms have been effective in sharing out instant information and hot takes, it can prove to be challenging to hold complicated conversations within the character limit of Twitter or on Facebook, where the spread of misinformation has proven to be difficult for the platform to manage. Due to the norms and affordances of podcasts--for better or worse--conversations that encourage community building, meaning making and exploration exist. There are no time constraints for podcasts--*The Read* routinely releases episodes that are over two hours in length.

Within this context, it makes sense that this would be attractive to folks whose identities have caused them to be underrepresented within media or have no access to the gatekeepers of traditional media. As the podcast industry continues to grow and mature, the podcast landscape has become more saturated. The top charts constantly have podcasts hosted by celebrities, legacy media or podcast networks. The democratizing appeal of podcasts is becoming less and less true. However, this does not negate the

possibilities that exist for the average, everyday person with access to a recording device such as their smartphone and the ability to upload a podcast episode.

Beyond the ease of use, podcasts have served as a space to work through the ever-changing meaning and production of Blackness. In their now-defunct podcast *For Colored Nerds* (independent; 2014-2017), hosts Brittany Luse and Eric Eddings described their show as "the conversations that Black people have when White people aren't in the room." This tagline could be applied to many podcasts hosted by Black folks. My work builds upon Sarah Florini's work on Black podcasts as audio enclaves. She also argues that Black podcasts sound different from traditional podcasts due to the informal, conversational tone, use of Black vernacular and the building of community among its listeners.

Before I continue, it is important for me to clearly define how I am identifying Black podcasts. The interaction that I had with the podcaster shifted my definition and forced me to sit with the notion of Black podcasting. As stated before, it is not enough for a podcast to be hosted by a Black person. They have the right to not identify as a Black podcaster or to label their podcast as a Black podcast. When I say Black podcast, I mean a podcast that is not only hosted by a Black person but one who holds Blackness as a political and cultural identity. So this can look like centering topics that would be of interest to Black communities, centering Black voices and perspectives and showing interest in Black audiences. This is not to say that all Black podcasts or podcasters have a monolithic perspective or voice. Blackness is not a monolithic identity.

In this project, I will be focusing my analysis on Black podcasters and the performance of Black podcasts. Blackness is a central identity marker, and this is signified in a number of ways, from the hosts addressing Black listeners (and directly addressing listeners who do not belong to this group) and affirming that they are the intended audience; discussing issues and topics that directly impact Black communities; and explicitly naming that this is a Black podcast (or in the words of *The Read* podcast--a Black ass podcast), among other signifiers. Black podcasters, or podcast hosts, will be defined as hosts who directly address other Black listeners; are aligned with Blackness as a political identity and explicitly express that identity. These attributes are just a few--different podcast hosts have their own ways of signifying their Black identity. There is no one way to express this identity, as Blackness contains multitudes.

These Black podcasts are steeped in the marginalization of their hosts' identities. The hosts reject a colorblind ideology in exchange for a political and cultural embrace of Blackness. Marginality is a space to remain in, one that helps to cultivate identity, community and pride among themselves and their listeners. In the following opening chapter, I'll expand upon Katharine McKittrick's concept of "the last place they thought of," in relation to podcasts and marginality, and the possibilities for imagining new worlds within Black podcasts. Ultimately, this dissertation is about the expression of boldness, Blackness and the cultivation of Black audio subjects. Pull out your headphones and take a listen.

Chapter 1: The Stories In Our Voices

> Podcasting is such an interesting medium to connect with women about beauty—especially Black women. We have such unique beauty experiences, whether it's growing up and learning about our hair texture or long days spent in the salon. These things are passed down from our mothers. We even learn to mix things up in or own kitchens to use as a hair mask or a face mask. All of those rituals are so rooted in a lot of Black and Brown women's stories about beauty, and I wanted to bring these to life through a podcast.- Brooke DeVard[2]

In the above quote, *The Naked Beauty* podcast host Brooke DeVard discusses the power in Black women telling stories about their experiences with beauty. In an oral platform like podcasting, those stories come to life and reveal the diversity of experience and thought among Black women. This dissertation seeks to explore how Blackness is expressed and cultivated within podcasts. The research questions that will guide this research include: How do Black podcasts perform and negotiate marginality and difference? How can Black podcasts shift our definition of marginalized media? How do Black podcasts sound? How do Black podcasts impact our understanding of Blackness?

Marginalization, or the last place they thought of, lies at the foundation of this research. "The last place they thought of" (McKittrick) refers to the garreted space in her grandmother's home where enslaved Linda Brent Jacobs hid for years to escape captivity. The garret was an extremely small space that granted Jacobs a peripheral knowledge and access to things not intended for her vision or sight. No one suspected that she would be located in this space, or that from this particular space she would be able to orchestrate her freedom. She existed in "the last place they thought of." Her knowledge of this

[2] https://www.ipsy.com/blog/naked-beauty-podcast-brooke-devard-interview

hidden space, of ways to outsmart her would-be captors, kept her alive for years. This particular knowledge, and the insight that she gained while in hiding, was specifically due to her identity as a marginalized, enslaved person. McKittrick refashions the margins as "the last place they thought of," and defines it as the following: "geographies of black femininity that are not necessarily marginal, but are *central* to how we know and understand space and place; black women's geographies are workable and lived subaltern spacialities, which tell a different geographic story" (p. 62). In other words, McKittrick is somewhat doing away with the margins concept in favor of a different location, one that is specific to the identity of Black women. Building upon bell hooks' classic work on the margins, Vrikki and Malik position subaltern/marginalized podcasts as "much more than a site of deprivation…that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space for resistance" (p. 276).

Within the margins and the last place they thought of lies the possibility of imagining new worlds that center marginalized people. The marginalized identity allows for this reimagining, this new way of thinking. I am studying these podcasts—these Black podcasts, these Black feminist podcasts, specifically because of the marginalized identities of the hosts and the podcasts.

Podcasts

I will be analyzing episodes from the following Black podcasts: *The Black Joy Mixtape* (independent; 2016-2018)*, Tea with Queen and J* (independent; 2014-)*, The Clubhouse with Mouse Jones* (Loud Speakers Network; timeframe unknown) and

Marsha's Plate (independent; 2017-). All of these podcasts have Black hosts, as well. Transcription was provided for each episode. As an auditory medium it can be difficult to accurately depict who is speaking while providing transcription. There may also be some inaccuracies reflected in the transcriptions even while listening closely to the episodes. As many of these episodes intentionally reflect regular conversations as opposed to more polished news segments, the participants frequently speak over each other, and the audio is inaudible at times. It can also be difficult to translate some phrases or words in the transcriptions. These are important things to consider when analyzing podcasts—accurate transcripts are not always available in the show notes or descriptions, presumably due to the labor involved in producing transcriptions for lengthy shows that are produced on a weekly basis. Next, I will provide a description of each of the podcasts and its relevance to the dissertation.

The Black Joy Mixtape

The Black Joy Mixtape (2016-2018) was a Black feminist political and cultural commentary podcast, hosted by Amber J. Phillips (the High Priestess of Black Joy) and Jazmine Walker (Da K.O.S--King of the South). Hosted in the Washington, D.C. area, this independent podcast provided accessible political commentary from a Black feminist perspective. This podcast anchors the "Black Joy Headquarters" chapter. The podcast has unfortunately been on an indefinite hiatus since 2018, presumably due to lack of resources and the labor involved in producing an independent podcast. *The Black Joy*

Mixtape's episodes were usually around one hour, and sometimes featured guests—two of the episodes that I am analyzing have guests.

I analyze the following episodes of the podcast:

"Track #24: An Abortion Story Ft. Micha'le" (May 5, 2017)
"Track #54: MeTooRemastered: Be Careful with Us" (April 12, 2018)
"Track #59: I'm Worthy (Ft. Black Femme Brunch)" (September 7, 2018)

I look at the ways that the podcast espouses Black feminist ideals and values. In the first episode--Track "#24: An Abortion Story Ft. Micha'le" (May 5, 2017)--the hosts are joined by their friend Micha'le, who shares the story of her abortion. In the next episode--Track "#54: MeTooRemastered: Be Careful with Us" (April 12, 2018), I analyze the latter part of the episode, in which Jazmine shares the story of her sexual assault at the hands of a former lover, within the context of the Me Too Movement. The final episode analyzed in this chapter--Track "#59: I'm Worthy (Ft. Black Femme Brunch)" (September 7, 2018) is a detailed interview with the founders of the Black Femme Brunch, which is an organized group of social events that center Black queer, feminine-identified women.

These episodes were chosen because they each showcase how the hosts embody various aspects of Black feminism. In this chapter, I focus on how the hosts use the episodes to re-imagine new worlds using a Black feminist lens, such as rethinking quality abortion healthcare as a form of reparations in response to an abusive situation that their friend and guest Micha'le endured while seeking abortion services. I also examine the ways that the podcast replicates sacred and intimate spaces through the use of the living room as their makeshift recording studio and self-proclaimed "Black Joy Headquarters."

Replicating intimacy is not always an easy thing to do, but the podcast space, which encourages long, deep and detailed conversations, served as an appropriate space to do so. In turn, the living room as sacred space is a theme that is found within these episodes and again echoes "the last place they thought of." Within the last place they thought of is an opportunity for the marginalized to be centered, and we see this happen as Amber imagines new healthcare possibilities that operate from a space of dignity and humanity for Black women. Choosing to remain within the last place they thought of is a direct rejection of a place that does not celebrate our humanity.

Tea with Queen & J

Tea with Queen & J (2014-) is a Black womanist cultural podcast, hosted by Queen and J. The Brooklyn-based podcast is independently operated and provides sharp and witty cultural commentary about the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality with popular culture. This podcast anchors the "Black Girl Shit" chapter. The episode that I am analyzing is a pre-recorded panel that the hosts released as an episode for the show. The panel premiered at South by Southwest, a media and culture fest in Austin, TX, in 2018. In addition to Queen and J, the panel featured a variety of Black female podcast hosts—Brooke DeVard of *The Naked Beauty* (2016-), Diamond Stylz of *Marsha's Plate* (2016-), Laura Mignott of *The Reset* and Money and Nikeeta of *QueerWOC*. The episode is titled "#164: #ListenToBlackWomen: Podcasting As Black Oral Tradition" (July 24, 2018). A second episode of *Tea with Queen & J* is also analyzed in the "Couldn't Be Me

Girl" chapter—"#188: Couldn't Be Me Girl" (January 8, 2019). In this episode, the hosts analyze and reflect on the *Surviving R. Kelly* docuseries.

In March 2018, Queen and J of the *Tea with Queen & J* podcast organized a panel of Black women podcasters for the South by Southwest media festival in Austin, TX. They recorded the panel, titled "Listen to Black Women: Podcasting as Oral Tradition" as an episode of the same name for the podcast and released it on July 24, 2018. The panel features Queen, J, Brooke DeVard (*The Naked Beauty*), Diamond Stylz (*Marsha's Plate)*, Money and Nikeeta (*Queer WOC)* and Laura Mignott (*The Reset)*.

Queen and J intentionally gathered a group of diverse Black women to discuss their experiences within the podcast industry. They have all had specific experiences related to their many marginalized identities, such as race, gender, sexual orientation and nationality. These experiences have impacted the ways that they show up for their shows and construct their imagined audiences for each of their shows. Hearing about the experiences of Black female podcasters is crucial for understanding how marginalization is performed and conceptualized among those creating media on the margins. This chapter also embodies one of the first characteristics of Black podcasts, which is a focus on Black audiences. The podcast hosts in this chapter do so by speaking in coded language and refusing to use explanatory commas, thus privileging the knowledge of its Black audiences.

Marsha's Plate

Marsha's Plate (2016-) is an independent Black trans-centered podcast. Hosted by Diamond Stylz, Mia Mix and Zee, the Houston-based podcast focuses on the experiences and perspectives of Black trans folks. The podcast was created in response to the lack of accurate representations of Black trans people in mainstream media. Diamond Stylz is featured in episode #164 of *Tea with Queen & J*, where she speaks about her experiences as a Black trans woman within the podcast industry. The hosts of *Marsha's Plate*, along with the hosts of *Tea with Queen & J* and *QueerWOC* (also featured in episode #164 of *Tea with Queen & J)* are part of the "Baddie Brigade," a collective of Black podcasters who offer each other support and often appear on each other's podcasts. The episode of *Marsha's Plate* that I am analyzing for the "Couldn't Be Me Girl" chapter is "#63: Surviving You, Them, and Ourselves #MarshasPlate" (January 10, 2019). In this episode, Stylz takes the lead and draws connections between the lack of care for R. Kelly's victims due to their identity as Black women and girls, to the lack of concern for the abuse that some young Black queer folks experience at the hands of older Black queer people also due to their identity as vulnerable and marginalized young people.

The Clubhouse with Mouse Jones

The Clubhouse with Mouse Jones was a cultural podcast hosted on the Loud Speakers Network by Mouse Jones. A New York-based podcast, Jones provided hilarious commentary on a variety of cultural topics. The show has been on an unexplained, indefinite hiatus and the majority of episodes have been scrubbed from most platforms. I

accessed the episodes for the "Couldn't Be Me Girl" chapter on YouTube. Those episodes are "Deconstructing R. Kelly with Jamilah Lemieux & Toure" (January 10, 2019) and "Dani" (January 11, 2019). These episodes were chosen because of the timeframe in which they were published—these episodes aired within a few days of the end of the *Surviving R. Kelly* docuseries. Jamilah Lemieux and Toure' are both journalists who were also prominently featured in the docuseries. They reflected on the role that Black media played in perpetuating Kelly's abuse. Toure', in particular, reflected on the critical moments that he helped orchestrate—procuring the falsified marriage certificate between Kelly and an underage Aaliyah, and the first interview in 2008 with Kelly after he was acquitted of charges related to a sex tape with another underage girl. These two podcast episodes were also particularly relevant because in real time, Jones is able to allow a survivor of sexual assault at the hands of Toure' to share her story and perspective after hearing him discuss sexual violence on the previous episode. Together, these episodes help not only further contextualize Black media's reckoning with Kelly, but to model how podcasting can provide a platform in real time to survivors of abuse.

METHODOLOGY

For this project, I am utilizing textual analysis and close reading and listening. The episodes will serve as the text and are an important object of analysis. The podcasts and episodes are listed in the previous section. As an avid listener and fan of these podcasts, I am familiar with their formats and language used by the hosts. I will utilize

what Catherine Squires (2000) describes as close listening and reading while transcribing the episodes. This close listening and reading involves close attention to the "tones of the conversations, vocal emphases and the like to create better descriptions of the conversations" (p. 79). This is important because humor is a crucial component of several of these particular Black podcasts, and this is not always easy to translate into written text. Many of the hosts use cultural and regional references, slang and variations of African American English Vernacular, and this all must be taken into account while transcribing the episodes. My knowledge and familiarity of the shows as an avid listener has assisted me in this close listening and reading. The close listening and reading allowed for the emergence of themes and threads.

Brock's (2018) critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) will be beneficial to this project. CTDA rejects the idea that discourses about technology use by marginalized groups should stem from a deficit perspective. It encourages the use of a critical perspective (for this project, this will be Black feminist theory) to be applied to technology usage. This methodology will affirm my stance that Black podcasts' marginalized status within the podcast industry and due to its hosts' identities is not an inferior stance to non-Black podcasts. CTDA "draws directly from the perspective of the group under examination" and "focuses on the social construction of technology" (p. 50).

I am using a Black feminist epistemology as the theoretical framework for this project. Scholar Venus Evans-Writers describes the work of a Black feminist researcher:

> Black women's (as the researcher and researched) experiences are at the center of analysis in the qualitative research process informed by Black feminist thought. The Black feminist qualitative researcher begins with reflections on her own lived experiences and brings those insights into the research process (p. 20)

Using Black feminist thought puts Black women at the center of this research. I am not just studying podcasts, I am intentionally studying Black podcasts primarily hosted by Black women. Their various identities which include being women shape the podcasts that they have created, the topics that they discuss and the way that they speak. Too often, Black women are excluded from discourses in which they are actively present. This research seeks to remedy this. As part of my use of a Black feminist analysis, I operate from the lens that Black female podcast hosts, operating from various identities, stand as intellectuals whose work deserve to be considered as serious texts. This research positions Black podcasts as media made from the margins. Media made from the margins, I am arguing, prioritizes the perspectives of those whose identities are either ignored, misrepresented, or rarely if ever acknowledged in mainstream media.

My love of podcasting drives this project. I am a fan and an avid listener. My intersecting identities also impact the ways that I listen to podcasts, which in turn, impacts the particular lens I use to analyze podcasts. I pay close attention to tone, I listen for the silences, I identify the cultural references and significance of these references for other Black audiences. I listen to these podcasts with a Black cultural identity lens. As a Black feminist podcast researcher, it is important to be clear about my particular positionality.

This project analyzes the technological and production context in which these podcasts are made, through the lens of media production studies. These Black podcasts are produced in response to specific cultural moments, such as the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter, which must be taken into account when analyzing the episodes. In particular, a cultural studies lens has been useful in thinking through the responses that each podcast had to these major events. A media production focus is crucial, as these podcasters had specific experiences because of the many marginalized identities that they held.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blackness and the Public Sphere

People have always communicated with each other about the state, culture and other issues. Even if they do not have access to power or direct involvement in politics, people will gather to discuss and critique political matters. Juergen Habermas' theorizations about the public sphere discussed gatherings of people in European Aristocratic societies as the state and culture developed and advanced. This public sphere, separate from the state, allowed for a participatory society. Members of the public sphere, in critiquing the state, also helped to cultivate various sectors of culture, in which people consumed information and entertainment. This public sphere, however, was exclusionary and lacked an intersectional perspective. Scholars have since critiqued and built upon Habermas' useful but limited theorizations about the public sphere.

A feminist lens calls for acknowledgment of multiple public spheres. Marginalized groups use public spheres to address and develop oppositional identities and standpoints. Nancy Fraser's alternative counterpublics theorizes about how women use counterpublics to develop their unique perspectives and needs. Gwendolyn Pough offered a Black feminist perspective of public spheres and used Black women's participation in hip hop to further ground this lens.

Catherine Squires (2002) further expands public sphere theory by offering the concept of multiple Black spheres instead of a singular Black public sphere. Squires notes that there are various identities within the Black collective, and these groups have varying relationships and desires to interact with the state and other publics. As such, she expands the multiple Black public sphere as not solely consisting of various Black identities, but also varied interests that shift over time. Different groups may find different uses for multiple public spheres. Blackness and Black experiences are not a monolith, she argues, which necessitates the acknowledgment and plurality of public spheres. Examples of Black public spheres include the "Black press, popular music and the church" (p. 451). Each public serves different needs for various groups within the collective Black identity. Squires continues, "It is within these institutions that conversations about Black publicity, rights, and interests take place and are transformed into strategies to counter the oppression of White supremacist rule" (p. 451).

These same kinds of conversations take place within Black podcasts. Squires argues that although Black collective resistance might appear to be on the decline, it has just shifted to the different publics (and this changes over time, depending on the political

and social climate). Even as this shifts over time, the need for Black publics will still exist as long as White supremacy and patriarchy guides our society. "As long as our society's notions and employment of racial differences continues to structure and influence social hierarchies, attitudes and actions, there will be a need for black collectives--as well as other collectives--to emerge to take on race matters, from whatever ideological position" (p. 455).

Squires theorizes about three different kinds of Black publics--enclaves, satellites and publics. Enclaves emerge from the necessity of marginalized groups to have spaces where they are safe to voice their concerns and develop oppositional strategies. Enclaves "[utilizes] spaces and discourses that are hidden from the view of the dominant public and the state" (p. 458). For their safety, enclaves are hidden from view, while sometimes interacting with dominant publics through the use of a "public transcript." The public transcript "reinforces unequal social positions and frustrates natural impulses to perform reciprocal actions on the oppressor" (p. 458). The hidden transcript, however, flourishes in these enclaved spaces. Black-only spaces, Squires argues, "fulfill functions for Black collectives that mainstream public arenas, institutions, and media have not" (p. 459).

"Satellite public spheres aim to maintain a solid group identity and build independent institutions" (p. 463). Satellites interact with mainstream publics when necessary, and when their interests converge in some way with dominant publics. Squires argues that members of satellites do "not feel compelled to hide or change cultural particularities" (p. 464). …is an example of a Black satellite public sphere. For many of the podcasts I am studying, particularly those with an explicit Black feminist framework,

they do not wish to operate from a hidden or public transcript. They are straightforward and deliberate about centering and prioritizing the needs and interests of Black women and feminine-identified people, along with fellow Black feminists who don't fall into those categories. I will argue that the structure of podcasts makes this more feasible, as opposed to traditional media that has to court mass audiences (Even when the media caters to a niche audience). As podcasts increase in popularity and the industry continues to mature, this may change. But it is still worth noting the ways that this is done within podcasts.

The last public that Squires details is a counterpublic. Counterpublics engage with other publics in order to collaborate on ideas or movements, such as sit-ins.

Sarah Florini (2015) describes a group of Black podcasts, deemed the chitlin' circuit as a nod to earlier Black performers who centered Black audiences in the face of exclusion, as audio enclaves. As audio enclaves, Black podcasts, similar to Black social spaces such as the barber shop and the church, provide a space free from the White gaze. Digital platforms such as podcasts, however, can make this difficult, as it is harder to guard who has access. Podcasts can avoid this due to the time that one invests in finding and listening to them, Florini argues. For some Black listeners, the act of listening to a podcast, particularly with headphones or during a commute, allows the listener to cocoon themselves into the sounds of this Black audio enclave.

Catherine Knight Steele (2018) builds upon this work and applies it to Black blogs. Of particular importance to my project is how the blogs, which are visible to anyone, maintain the focus of a Black identity. "The bloggers are operating within a

medium that is accessible to anyone, yet the content is created specifically for a black audience. Black art and media, in this discussion, exists for the maintenance of group identity and the strengthening of institutions" (p. 119). Knight Steele insists that "much like Black Twitter...blogs replicate the kind of oral cultural exchange central to the black community" (p. 113). Her work seeks to address how Black bloggers navigate both the private and public nature of the Internet while centering Black audiences. I argue that Black podcasts do the same, specifically Black podcasts whose central identity is its Blackness. Building upon Squires, Knight Steele and Florini, I will analyze Black podcasts through the lens of enclaves.

Black publics create, maintain and protect spaces intended for Black folks. Melissa Harris-Lacewell (2010) describes these important spaces as akin to the Black beauty shop or barbershop. Both of these spaces, Harris-Lacewell argues, are important gathering spaces for Black people to relax, enjoy other Black people and discuss political and cultural happenings (similar to Habermas' coffee house as a gathering place for the Aristocratic public sphere).

Black podcasts, like other digital media platforms, serve as important sites of empowerment for marginalized groups. In the wake of the movement for Black lives, social media has been utilized to build communities and document oppositional strategies. Florini (2017) writes about how the podcast, This Week In Blackness! used its various social media platforms as a sounding board for its users to discuss the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. Users were not seeing the kinds of discussions had on the podcast happening on traditional media platforms. This also occurred in digital

counterpublics, as Marc Lamont Hill (2018) and Sarah J. Jackson and Sonia Banaszczyk (2016) note about Twitter and hashtags addressing racial and gendered issues.

Digital Media

My work builds upon important work regarding Black Twitter. Research on Black Twitter insists that there is no monolithic Black Twitter community, but that there are specific experiences unique to Black culture that are replicated within Black Twitter. This work builds upon preceding work, which made connections between technology and the experiences of people of color (Watkins, 2009; Everett 2009).

Hashtags play a key role in Black Twitter, as it is one of the ways that made the community visible to outsiders. Brock (2012), however, asserts that even with this visibility, this "Black discourse was (and still is) unconcerned with the mainstream gaze" (p. 534). Brock and Florini (2014) both assert that a key element of Black Twitter is the performance of Blackness that occurs through hashtags, memes, gifs, etc. Signifyin' is an important practice for Black users of Twitter, as "tweet-as-signifyin', then , can be understood as a discursive, public performance of Black identity" (p. 537). There is a level of cultural competence necessary to perform this Blackness, and for other users familiar with what is being signified to understand it. So yes, hashtags have made Black Twitter visible, but to fully understand hashtags such as #ThanksgivingWithBlackFamilies, there has to be a familiarity with Black communal traditions. This further helps to distinguish *who* the intended audience is. You can look, sure, but if you can't understand, you will quickly become an outsider. Black podcasters

use the same kind of cultural familiarity and humor to privilege and center their Black audiences. Hashtags are also central to building community and awareness among marginalized groups, as evidenced by the work of Jackson, Bailey and Foucault Welles (2018) and their work on trans activism and the hashtag #GirlsLikeUs.

Identity and Difference

Marginalization is a process that White supremacy, colonialism and patriarchy have steep investments in. Frantz Fanon discusses the impact of colonization on Black people, and the desire to be close to the "protection of Whiteness." Colonialism, Fanon asserts, makes it difficult to separate the colonized identity from that imposed by the colonizer. He describes this further with the impact of language: "To speak a language is to appropriate its world and culture. The Antillean who wants to be white will succeed, since he will have adopted the cultural tool of language...It should be understood that historically the black man wants to speak French, since it is the key to open doors which only fifty years ago still remained close to him" (p. 21). Although the margins can be a place of opposition and liberation, it can be painful to be reminded of the subordinate status within the margin. The center and its false promise of power can look more alluring and attractive, particularly if one has internalized the idea that Whiteness and the power that comes along with it as superior. W.E.B. DuBois ' notion of "double consciousness is also useful. "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." This double

consciousness helps to construct the sense of Otherness that comes from residing within the margins. It impacts the way marginalized people see themselves. To be made aware of one's status as an Other, as constantly inferior, is maddening. Recognizing multiple identities and the ways that this impacts how one experiences oppression is key. Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality insists that a single-axis identity framework does not fully articulate the experiences of those whose identities rest at the furthest margins.

What is at stake in determining what belongs at the center as opposed to the margin? The center has been a taken-for-granted location, with little attention drawn to it. This further constructs the concept of the Other--the Other is not part of the center. But this leaves the center unmarked, unquestioned. Scholars Ruth Frankenberg and Richard Dyer challenge scholars to consider how Whiteness has been allowed to remain unmarked. Even within the concept of identity and difference, it is assumed that these concepts only apply to those whose identities are marginalized, those whose difference stands in opposition to the norm or the center. Further theorizing this, Audre Lorde writes: "In america, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society." Within Lorde's statement, it is clear that this "mythical norm" actually leaves very little room for many people. This shows how unstable Whiteness is as a category, even as people strive to reap its benefit. In not considering Whiteness as an identity marker, we leave the risk of fully interrogating its relationship to power, of deconstructing the different margins within this false center. In

not considering Whiteness when discussing difference, this perpetuates the idea that only those defined as "Other" can hold oppositional views or counterknowledge. In discussing and naming Whiteness we get new insights into racial construction and formation. We get to see how Whiteness has consistently been avoided in discussing racial ideologies, even as it works to cement marginalization in others (and within those White folks who do indeed hold marginalized identities). There are times, however, when Whiteness is not as unmarked.

bell hooks addresses the "particular way of seeing reality" due to "living on the edge." This statement speaks volumes about how those who are marginalized view their difference. Living on the edge means that there is an awareness of the difference between those on the outside and those closer to the center. But it also calls attention to the different ways of knowing that are a result of being an outsider. In being an outsider, the person has a unique perspective of how they see the "insider." Lorde states : "For in order to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as american as apple pie, have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection." So, in this instance, in recognizing one's difference, there are also survival techniques that are developed in order to cope with being marginalized.

Scholar Katherine McKittrick has theorized that Black women's identity locations has always been racialized and sexualized. In her work *Demonic grounds: Black women and the cartographies of struggle,* McKittrick uses the autobiography of Harriet Jacobs to further illuminate this point. Jacobs escaped enslavement by hiding in a very tight and

contained space in her grandmother's house, for seven years. She hid in "the last place they thought of," which McKittrick beautifully uses to develop a useful Black feminist spatial politics. Not only did Jacobs outsmart her would-be captors by hiding in this space, it also took a certain knowledge of her grandmother's house and a well-crafted plan to evade the slave-catchers, who would not have guessed where she was hiding due to their own lack of intimate knowing of her grandmother's space. While in this space, hidden from the captors, Jacobs has access to things that she would not have been privy to before due to her precarious position as a free Black young woman--she hears conversations not intended for her ears. This special vantage point also helps her develop an escape plan and further evade her captives. McKittrick states that "black women have an investment in space, and spatial politics, precisely because they have been relegated to the margins of knowledge and have therefore been imagined as outside of the production of space" (p. 54). The margins are the last place they thought of, and because of this, provides a rich area of knowledge. McKittrick continues: "...peripheral and marginal lives incite a political stance that is adversarial, oppositional, resistant, experiential, valuable, and hard-working. The identity-location of particular black women, fostered by a legacy of racism and sexism, is thus refashioned as a politics that is underpinned by geographic metaphors, lived experiences and different worldviews" (p. 55). Scholarship that comes from the "last place they thought of" provides new insights, challenges and perspectives on power and marginalized people's relationship to it. It also provides new insights into the margin and the center. The last place they thought of represents the margins, and "they" represent the center, but within "the last place they thought of" is an

opportunity to think through a new space that simultaneously is made up of the margins and the center.

More recent scholarship in Black feminist thought reiterates the importance of intersectionality and exploring multiple identities. Scholarship like that of Joan Morgan (2015) and Treva Lindsey and Jessica Marie Johnson (2014) centers Black women's pleasure and reimagines a Black feminist framework that leaves room to consider this notion. Aisha Durham et. al (2013), building upon the earlier work of Morgan (1999), offer hip hop feminism as scholarship that, in Morgan's words, is brave enough to fuck with the grays, or the complicated questions that younger Black feminists ask of a feminism that they continue to grapple with. Kristen Warner (2017) and Racquel Gates (2018) pushes the field to rethink Black media representation and to do away with a binary understanding of this representation. This modern Black feminist thought is often accessible and involves public scholarship. The Black feminist and womanist podcasts that I am researching build upon and are influenced by work like this, and this will provide a strong foundation for analysis of these podcasts. Together these scholars push forward our understandings of Blackness, marginalization and new concepts of the center.

Marginalization

Jennifer L. Stoever's (2016) work on the "sonic color line" is a crucial text for this field. There are visual markers for race, but Stoever argues that it is important to also pay attention to the sonic politics of race. Stoever's work encourages a shift from

focusing on how visual optics racializes us, to how sound contributes to the racial order of society. “Far from being vision’s opposite, sound frequently appears to be visuality’s doppelgänger in U.S. racial history, unacknowledged but ever present in the construction of race and the performance of racial oppression” (p. 4) Sound is one of the crucial factors of this study. Traditional, White public radio or talk radio has a distinct sound (with variations of course, such as shock radio). But it is very different from the sounds of the podcasts that I will discuss in this study, and this is intentional. It is crucial to continue connecting race and sound.

In 2015, scholar and hip hop artist Chenjerai Kumanyika ignited a debate about the “public radio voice” when he wrote an article reflecting on a public radio piece he did for the Transom Traveling Workshop on Catalina. Kumanyika states that he did not recognize the voice he was using, which imitated White public radio hosts. His actual voice would not be acceptable on public radio, he thought, because it deviated from this standard voice. But this voice, void of regional inflections, accents, tones, etc. doesn’t actually represent anyone, and causes these stories to lose important cultural nuances. Almost immediately, responses were written, pondering his argument. Did the public radio voice exist, and was it a White voice? The answer was a resounding yes, which seems obvious to me, but was not to many of the people “discovering” this. Like Kumanyika, I hadn’t heard anything similar to my voice, or the voices of those that I loved, on public radio. Maybe on the urban radio stations I like to listen to, but certainly not on NPR. The “shock” at being confronted with the unmarkedness of Whiteness in public radio speaks to the prevalence of Black podcasts. The Read would probably not

have worked on NPR, and now it doesn't need to thanks to the popularity of podcast networks that can cater to niche audiences.

Florini (2015; 2017) has written crucial research on the connection of Blackness to podcasts. My work obviously builds from this. These Black podcasts, Florini posits, are different from other forms of media. "These podcasters largely eschew the " polished" and tightly formatted character of most mainstream corporate media, opting instead for an informal, flexible approach that allows for free-form conversation and embraces a range of Black vernaculars and regional accents" (p. 20). This aligns with what Chenjerai Kumanyika wrote about the voice he used that differed so drastically from his regular speaking voice, that was void of any emotion or specificity of any part of his identity. In his article, Kumanyika muses that his uncle would be too loud for public radio and display too much emotion. But he would be right at home on a Black podcasts, where that specificity adds to the flavor and tone of the show. Regarding visibility, Florini argues that it is actually easier for Black podcasts to exist apart from the mainstream gaze. "The temporal commitment required increases the difficulty of intruding into the conversations, compared to Twitter or other social media that are easily searchable and have algorithms, such as the Trending Topics, that make Black discourses more visible to the mainstream gaze" (p. 214)

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Each chapter of the dissertation focuses on the expression and performance of Blackness within podcasts. The dissertation opens with the "Black Girl Shit" chapter in

which I explore the voices and lived experiences of a group of Black female podcasters. In March 2018, Queen and J of the *Tea with Queen & J* podcast organized a panel of Black women podcasters for the South by Southwest media festival in Austin, TX. They recorded the panel, titled "Listen to Black Women: Podcasting as Oral Tradition" as an episode of the same name for the podcast and released it on July 24, 2018. The panel features Queen, J, Brooke DeVard (*The Naked Beauty*), Diamond Stylz (*Marsha's Plate)*, Money and Nikeeta (*Queer WOC)* and Laura Mignott (*The Reset)*.

In the next chapter, "Black Joy Headquarters," I focus on *The Black Joy Mixtape*, an independent podcast that ran from 2016-2018. Hosts Amber J. Phillips and Jazmine Walker identify as Black feminists and frame their cultural and political podcast within the same lens. In this chapter, I use textual analysis and close listening to examine three episodes of the podcast.

In the fourth chapter--"Couldn't Be Me Girl: Black Podcasts Reckon With A Legend," I use a case study of the 2019 *Lifetime* network docuseries *Surviving R. Kelly* to examine how Black podcasts reckon with holding a Black cultural icon accountable for abuse allegations. Singer R. Kelly's career spans several decades, and it has been marred by allegations of abuse, sexual misconduct and pedophilia. Whispers of this abuse has plagued him for the duration of his career, and in 2016, the #MuteRKelly campaign brought new interest into these allegations and, ultimately, justice to the victims of his abuse. In January 2019, *Surviving R. Kelly* aired as a six-part docuseries featuring a plethora of interviews by guests with a number of connections to Kelly, weighing in on the abuse. After the docuseries aired, a number of Black podcasts released in-depth

episodes examining the show from different angles and discussing the impact of the docuseries on Black pop culture. For this chapter, I examine episodes from the Black trans podcast *Marsha's Plate* (#63: Surviving You, Them, and Ourselves #MarshasPlate; January 10, 2019); *Tea with Queen & J* (#188: Couldn't Be Me Girl; January 8, 2019) and *The Clubhouse with Mouse Jones (*Deconstructing R. Kelly with Jamilah Lemieux & Toure; January 10, 2019 and Dani; January 11, 2019).

Using these episodes, I explore how the podcasts reckoned with Kelly's position as a Black musical icon, and the role that Black media specifically played in lifting Kelly up and perpetuating his career, essentially turning a blind eye to the abuse. Each of the podcasts grapple with what it means to hold not only Kelly accountable, but Black media and communities at large accountable for the refusal to take his crimes seriously. In looking back on Black media's relationship to Kelly, the podcast hosts are also forced to grapple with the roles they play as part of the larger Black media ecosystem. How can they do things differently as a new media format? I also use the episodes to explore the ways that an ethics of care can be implemented to center guests and reduce harm as guests struggle with sensitive issues. For example, I look at how podcasts can be sensitive to survivors of abuse.

In the final chapter which concludes the dissertation—"Media From The Margins," I come back to what it means to have Black-branded and identified media content, particularly in this current media and social landscape where the meaning of Blackness is shifting and being contested in new and dynamic ways. What role do podcasts play in this rearticulation, and what lies ahead? I think through the future

directions that I hope this project will take and discuss what I could not include in this study due to the scope of the project but wish to explore in a longer manuscript.

Ultimately, it is my hope that this project adds to the growing field of Black Digital Media Studies and expands the subfield of Black Podcast Studies and enhances Podcast Studies. Podcasts are an exciting platform that continues to expand, particularly during the pandemic which has left the future of media so uncertain while also reinforcing the power and influence of digital media. It will be important to pay attention to the kinds of conversations happening on podcasts as they serve as an archive of how we are shifting our thinking and cultural understandings of marginalization and difference.

Chapter 2: Black Girl Shit

*All my n*ggas in the whole wide world*
Made this song to make it all y'all's turn
For us, this shit is for us
-"F.U.B.U", Solange (2016)

THIS IS FOR US

In singer Solange's classic song "F.U.B.U" from her 2016 album *A Seat At The Table* (Knowles and Nash, 2016), she sweetly croons "All my n*ggas in the whole wide world" so that there's no mistaking who the song is for or about. The term F.U.B.U means "for us, by us," and was popularized in the late 1990s and early 2000s by a hip hop-influenced clothing line of the same name[3]. FUBU is a markedly clear political statement. The song is for us. Our culture is for us. The song is a warning to those who wish to culturally appropriate Black culture--don't do it. Black culture is for *us*. For the website *Genius*, Solange further explained the significance of the song:

> I named it "F.U.B.U." because I wanted to empower, and I looked to people who have done that in their own ways. I thought of F.U.B.U. the brand, meaning "For Us By Us", and what kind of power it had and how normalized it became to wear that kind of symbolism every day. I remember reading stories on the product placement, and seeing LL Cool J wearing a F.U.B.U. hat in a national GAP advertisement. F.U.B.U. exhibited Blackness in any space, on a huge global level, and that is what I wanted to do with the song.

Towards the end of the song, to make her point even more clear, she sings the following:

Don't feel bad if you can't sing along
Just be glad you got the whole wide world
This us
This shit is from us

[3] FUBU was founded in 1992 by Daymond John, J. Alexander Martin, Keith Perrin and Carlton Brown.

Some shit you can't touch

With this song, Solange is directly addressing the concept of Black art being consumed by non-Black audiences. This is for *us*, she sings. I made this for *us*, she seems to say. She is direct in asserting a Very Black consciousness in this song (and in the entire project, I'd argue). With the song, we get a look into Solange's politics as an artist who is intentional about her Black identity and Black audience. *A Seat At The Table*, like many other albums made within the last few years, was a direct response to the social unrest that stemmed from the heightened focus on police brutality and other racist systemic inequalities that plague Black communities. Solange told NPR's *All Things Considered* (NPR; 1971-) the following about the explicitly Black identity of the album:

> I think one of the seats at the table is also saying that, you know, I'm inviting *you* to have a seat at *my* table. And it's an honor to be able to have a seat at our table and for us to open up in this way and for us to feel safe enough to have these conversations and share them with you. I think that, you know, so many times, black people — or any people who are oppressed — have to constantly explain to people what's right and wrong and what hurts and how to approach this. And I think that even me, I'm still learning so much about other cultures and I think that when you have the opportunity to learn from that, you are gracious and you are appreciative and you listen. And so that was also my way of saying I am opening myself up to everyone to have a seat at this table.

After the murders of teenagers Trayyon Martin in 2012, and Mike Brown in 2014, Black Lives Matter became the movement of our generation. The statement was echoed everywhere. Social media helped to bolster the movement and incited a political movement unlike anything I've ever seen before, and likely unlike anything anyone else has seen in decades. Political consciousness moved front and center into mainstream awareness in a way that it hadn't been in a long time. Black lives matter, activists

screamed. In times of political and civic unrest, cultural production often echoes this same sentiment.

Podcasts also responded to this political and consciousness raising as well. Much of the content that has been produced during this time has been in response to the social unrest that has taken place in America primarily since 2014. The desire to have things that are for us, by us, continues to ring true, and podcasts are an ideal space for that to occur, as they cater towards niche audiences and are conducive to community building. In 2013, after George Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, FL, the *This Week in Blackness!* podcast took calls for hours from distraught and dismayed listeners reacting to the verdict, calling in to process what was happening in real time (Florini, 2017). Black podcasts have helped listeners make sense of this fraught political and cultural moment.

In 2018, the hosts of *Tea with Queen and J*, put together their first panel featuring themselves and other Black female podcasters for the Austin, TX media festival South by Southwest (SXSW). During this panel, titled "#ListenToBlackWomen: Podcasting As Black Oral Tradition," the participants discussed their experiences in the podcast industry as Black women. Like Solange, the podcasters all expressed a very Black political and cultural identity, which has shaped their experiences in the industry. For most of them, their intended audience is Black. The absence of voices that reflect their own experiences and perspectives motivated them to create podcasts that they would like to hear and that closely reflected their identities. During the episode, Queen says that they created the panel to highlight "the ways in which Black women, throughout the diaspora, throughout

the history of us, have used oral tradition as storytelling, as ways to talk about our oppression or our happiness and all of those things, and how that's been a huge pillar just within Blackness period."

In this chapter, textual analysis is used to analyze the "#ListenToBlackWomen" SXSW panel, which was also recorded as an episode for the *Tea with Queen and J* podcast. The episode premiered on July 24, 2018[4], while the actual live panel took place at SXSW on March 11, 2018. In addition to Queen and J, the other panelists were: co-hosts of the Black queer podcast *Queer WOC* (independent; 2016-2021) Money and Nikeeta*;* host of the beauty and lifestyle podcast *The Naked Beauty* (independent; 2016-) Brooke DeVard; co-host of the Black trans podcast *Marsha's Plate* (independent; 2017-) Diamond Stylz and host of the business podcast *The Reset* (Laura Mignott).

[4] Due to the number of voices participating in this panel/episode, it was not always clear which person was speaking in order to accurately complete the episode transcription. I have tried to accurately label each person but there may be errors.

Podcast Name	Hosts	Show Descriptions[5]
Tea with Queen and J (2014-)	Queen; J	Two womanist race nerds talking liberation, politics & pop culture over tea. Dismantling White supremacist patriarchal capitalism one episode at a time.
Marsha's Plate (2017-)	Diamond Stylz; Zee; Mia Mix (Zee and Mia were not featured in this episode)	A Black trans Podcast. #MarshasPlate is a lively podcast where three friends come together every Thursday to share opinions and perspectives that centers the black perspective. Hosted By Diamond Stylz, Mia Mix, and Zee. All Houston-based digital strategists, black feminists, civil right advocates, and black trans people. We explore topics of gender, current events, politics, and scumbags all around the world upholding systems of oppression from a black trans feminist lens. With our funny no-holds-barred style we introduce you to new perspectives, stories that connect you to transness, and trans community leaders around the country
Queer WOC (2016-)	Money; Nikeeta6	Welcome to "QueerWOC: The Podcast". Join Money and Nikeeta, two Black Queer Troublemakers, on this biweekly insurgent audio syllabus that unites, ignites, and excites the queer women of color community. QueerWOC is a space for queer women and folks of color rooted in reimagining healing, organizing, and community. Join the conversation by sliding in the QueerWOC.com DM's! Follow @QueerWOCpod on IG and on Tumblr | @QueerWOCpod on Twitter Follow the creator: @moneymc.jpg Follow the curmudgeon: @afroblazingguns
The Reset (2019-)	Laura Mignott	**The Reset Podcast** is the brainchild of Laura Mignott, CEO of the cultural communications agency, DFlash. Each show, Laura brings on an interesting. game-changing, unique person from the worlds of business, marketing, advertising, media, tech, and more. Expect lots of laughs, frank talk & provocative solutions.
The Naked Beauty (2016-)	Brooke DeVard	Hosted by Brooke DeVard, ***the Naked Beauty Podcast*** delivers unfiltered talk about beauty trends, tips, and the products we love, with the girls who get it.

Table 1: Detailed descriptions of the podcasts featured on the SXSW panel for this episode.

[5] Show descriptions come directly from each show's podcast page.

[6] According to the Twitter account for *QueerWOC,* Nikeeta passed away on May 8, 2021.

Learning about the lived experiences of these podcasters provides a different lens to think through the significance of Black podcasts. The panel is constructed of a diverse group of Black women whose podcasts discuss a variety of topics. Queen and J state that they were intentional about choosing this group of panelists. Queen said the following:

> Yeah...cause people think diversity just means…'okay we just have all these Black women here: diversity is happening.' But it's like...are we talking about diversity and economics? Diversity in education? Diversity and...I don't know...sexuality. Diversity and gender. Like are we talking about that? Age? There's lots of ways for you to talk about diversity and inclusion that does not include race. And we...even though this was about Black women, we knew we could still be diverse, even on top of that.

The intentionality of the panel allowed for the inclusion of different voices, and affirmed that like Blackness, Black womanhood is varied and complex. Each panelist had unique experiences that led to them creating their podcast. The purpose of this chapter is to think through the experiences of Black women podcasters in order to get a different idea of what it means to hold marginalized identities and how this impacts the creation and production of their podcasts. As Queen and J state, they had seen little consideration of the experiences of Black female podcasters. Including themselves in this narrative ensures that their contributions (and those of the panel participants) will not be erased. In keeping with the last place they thought of, this chapter will illuminate the experiences of those holding marginalized identities, and how that space can be generative and contribute to the unique nature of their podcasts and specific audiences. In this next section, I will take a closer look into the literature on the ways that marginalized groups, particularly in digital media, have used the platforms as ways of resistance and community building.

HOLD UP, WAIT A MINUTE!

> Nikeeta: There are times we are speaking code. And those listeners will get it and other listeners will email us and say, "Hey, was following you but then you started talking about...yeah, what's a hotep?" Or we've been talking a lot about Black Panther and the ways in which that film leads to Kwanzaa principles. But we don't go over those principles and I know we have listeners who don't know what that is. So we'll say, 'hey guys, if you can Google, Google this.' And we carry on. We're not NPR. I don't need to explain. I'm not doing a huge explanatory comma. I'm not teaching you this. If you're interested in my content, I'm talking to other Black women. Things that you don't understand, we're open enough that you can ask us and we will tell you what to Google so that you can find it yourself. Um and I think that that is the difference between like what we do and re-centering ourselves as the main focus, as the default when white people and voices are typically the default for anything that happens in the US or in the colonized world. They tend to be the default. So making us the default and sometimes speaking in that coded language...it just reminds me of what our ancestors did. There's more comfort in speaking coded language.

In the above excerpt, *Queer WOC* co-host Nikeeta discusses the ways that she and her co-host Money center their intended audience, privileging those who can understand the "coded" language that she and Money use. This is an important affordance of podcasts, and particularly of independent podcasts with even more freedom to shape the podcast in the way they wish. As podcasters with a specific intended audience of queer women of color (during the panel, they say that their intended audience is in the title of their podcast), they do not feel an obligation or responsibility to speak to a wide audience, or even to make sure that the listeners understand the coded language. The hosts are clear--they are not providing explanatory commas.

In an article titled "Race and Culture Accessibility and the "Explanatory Comma[7]," the explanatory comma is defined as "the break a person takes to tack on an

[7] https://askanauthor.substack.com/p/race-and-culture-accessibility-and

explanation for the audience of what a term means." The author continues that the explanatory comma is also routinely used "where a cultural reference is a touchstone for a racial minority but much less well-known to, say, white people." The explanatory comma was further referenced in a 2016 (re-aired in 2019) episode of the NPR podcast about race, *Code Switch (2016-)*[8]. The hosts, Gene Demby and Shereen Marisol Meraji, discuss how as a staff they debated on when to use explanatory commas on their show. Below, they give an example of this.

> Shereen: Right. And let's see. We should give an example - right? - of an explanatory comma. OK. Here's one. Celia Cruz, probably best - no. Actually, it wouldn't be said like that. Celia Cruz, probably best known as the queen of Latin music, hailed from Cuba, an island in the Caribbean.
>
> Gene: They would identify the Caribbean. They would explain the Caribbean.
>
> Unidentified Person: Whatever salsa is, Celia Cruz is the undisputed queen of it. She was born in Havana, Cuba, probably more than 60 years ago. Celia Cruz says...
>
> Shereen: That little aside about Celia might be useful for people who don't know her.
>
> Gene: Right.
>
> Shereen: But for people who grew up in a house where her music was played and who can quimbara quimbara quma quimbamba (ph) all day and all night, well, that explanation says to that person, oh, this story is not for me.

The function of the explanatory comma is to provide further context or explanation of a concept that the listener may not understand. The term that precedes the explanatory comma is usually one that may not be as familiar or may be a new concept.

[8] https://www.npr.org/transcripts/782331005

While it is important to not assume the knowledge level of listeners, it is also an act of resistance to **not** provide the explanatory comma and refuse to educate. This provides power to the listeners who don't need the explanatory comma. It also encourages other listeners to do research on their own to learn more about the topic, so it requires them to be in control of their own education. In refusing to do an explanatory comma, the hosts are recentering themselves and reconfiguring who the "default" listener is.

For podcasts, the explanatory comma could be a quick aside or explanation. For others, like the *Politically Re-Active* podcast (Topic Studios; 2016-), it is an actual segment that interrupts the regular episode. Hosts Hari Kondabolu and W. Kamau Bell use the "Hold Up, Wait A Minute!" segment of their podcast to offer an explanatory comma. Other podcasts might bring in experts to further contextualize the explanatory comma. As shared above, this can be useful and inclusive for listeners who aren't familiar with a reference and are listening to the podcast to learn more. But who is the explanatory comma for?

Circling back to the NPR episode about explanatory commas, co-host Demby stated that an explanatory comma would be needed for him as he was not familiar with the singer Celia Cruz. It is important not to conflate "White listener" as a stand-in for listeners who are not part of the dominant audience, particularly when covering topics that center marginalized people. We are not a monolith and come to our knowledge with different lessons and perspectives. So the use of an explanatory comma is layered and complicated. But the ability to be intentional about centering niche audiences is an

affordance that podcasts, and other social media tools like blogs, offers especially to marginalized creators (Steele, 2018).

Let's return back to Nikeeta's example of the Kwanzaa principles. As a listener familiar with Kwanzaa and its significance *and* an understanding of *Black Panther*, I would not need an explanatory comma to understand the connection between Kwanzaa and *Black Panther*. If Nikeeta and Money had given an explanation I probably would have glazed over, or as the NPR hosts noted, recognized that this particular episode is not for me. This echoes the familiarity and intimacy of Black podcasts that are centering and catering to audiences who are familiar with Black cultural references. The refusal to use an explanatory comma, then, is a way of gatekeeping and deciding who can and cannot be a part of the audience.

One of the ways that the hosts privilege their intended audience is when they speak in code and make cultural references that rewards listeners that understand what is being said. In the following excerpt, one of the panelists discusses how they found community within other marginalized groups and the power of being able to speak in code as a form of safety.

> "...although I don't feel like there's ever been a space that I feel where like Black women could just talk and be safe. I think that because we are Black in an anti-Black society, are women in a patriarchal society, and are queer in a heteronormative and queerphobic society, we've learned ways to communicate with each other that make those spaces...like even in those toxic spaces, like we could be standing in a hallway and it becomes like a celebratory thing and people don't know what the hell we're talking about. Right? Like right in front of them. Like they can't access our space."

As the speaker insists, holding marginalized identities impacts the ways that Black women move in the world and are perceived. She states that there aren't spaces where we can "just talk and be safe." We are relegated to the margins in a patriarchal society because we are not male, because we are not White, etc. Our opinions are discarded, tossed to the side, not taken seriously. Queen and J organized this particular panel because they "wanted to talk about the shit that we haven't heard anyone else talk about in podcasting, and how Black women contribute to podcasting." In other words, they were not seeing people highlight the work that Black female podcasters were doing in their industry. This is why the speaker says that there aren't spaces where Black women can just be themselves.

In reconfiguring the default listener, it opens up different kinds of listening practices and rethinking how and what people listen for. As Nikeeta stated, the default listener is usually a White person. Whiteness has been both marked and unmarked as universal and also with no identity. The explanatory comma, in fact, is often used under the assumption that whatever needs explaining is something that the "default" listener would not understand and needs to be educated on. But in decentering this idea and centering Black queer women, Nikeeta and Money are speaking to a completely different audience. Those who do not need the explanatory comma are affirmed and this is a way to build community among listeners. Although anyone can listen, not everyone can understand, and that is intentional. As Solange reminds us:

Don't feel bad if you can't sing along
Just be glad you got the whole wide world

Not using the explanatory comma is a way that Black podcast hosts can center their audiences and keep the content for us, by us.

These podcasters (and listeners) have used their podcast platform to create those spaces to help strengthen those bonds. They are coming together over shared experiences of oppression, struggle, but also joy, triumph and love. And most importantly—"they can't access our space." This, of course, becomes more challenging with a public-facing platform like podcasting. Scholar Catherine Knight Steele (2018) writes about this with Black blogs, and the ways that they also have to protect the communities that they build between the bloggers and the readers. Similar to podcasts, blogs can be accessed by anyone who has access to the website. In creating community within a public space, there is the constant threat to the safety and sacred nature of the group when there are prying eyes from those who are not part of the community. This is a consequence of building community and identity on public platforms like Twitter, Facebook, blogs and podcasts. While the podcasters cannot determine who listens and therefore has access to the podcast, they can control how much access an outsider has. If you don't understand the references, there will be no explanatory comma made for your comfort. There will be no breaking of the boundaries set.

REPRESENTING MYSELF

In thinking through different listening practices and experiences, the panelists discussed how their own listening practices impacted how they came to podcasting. The ideas for their shows came from not seeing themselves represented in podcasting, and not

hearing voices that sounded like theirs. Relatability is a key aspect of what led these podcasters to branch out and create their own content. In the following excerpt, Laura from *The Reset* discusses how the advice given on business podcasts hosted by White men were not applicable to her.

> Similar to you J, I didn't hear anyone talking about business from a Black woman's perspective. And I was like, 'really?' I spent hours listening to all of the business-based podcasts that were all about 'how you're still crushing it in business' and it was just very lame and very sweaty White guys. And so I thought to myself, 'Well, I know what I'm doing. And if I just sort of speak to this, by default, my perspective and the world that I live in as a Black woman in business, I'll be able to bring that out to other people.

For Laura, her podcast sprung from a lack of representation in other business podcasts. As a Black woman, her experiences are drastically different from her non-Black peers, particularly those who are not women. She will more than likely encounter various systemic challenges and oppressions specifically because of the marginalized identities that she holds. A voice like hers, from her perspective was sorely needed in podcasting. According to a *Forbes* article (Umoh, 2020), Black women represented 42% of new women-owned businesses in 2020. However, Black women have less access to the capital needed to sustain these businesses over time such as outside investors or business loans. These hurdles are especially unique to Black female entrepreneurs.

As a listener, Laura describes the disappointment in hearing content that does not reflect her lived experience. This does not mean that only White men could listen to the podcasts that Laura initially described. But it does reflect again the patriarchal society that we live in where White men are privileged. It also reflects that there is a lack of diversity in hosts of business podcasts. So if a person is interested in business and does

not want to hear from White men, they might have a harder time hearing from diverse perspectives and particularly those who have experienced the specific business hardships that Black women face. Similar to Nikeeta and Money, Laura is centering her experiences as a Black woman and therefore providing a different and unique perspective of an entrepreneur. In the following excerpt, one of the panelists echoes a listener's perspective, of what it means to her when she does hear a podcast of someone that she can relate to or whose identity she shares with the host.

> When you hear someone who has a similar experience to yours talk about something, I don't...I have in the past tried to listen to White guys talk about business and it just never connected with me. Never. It was like this...he's talking from an experience that I won't be able to achieve unless I do all these other things that he's never even had to consider. But when I listen to your podcast, I'm like I can...as a person who doesn't consider herself business-minded, I can wrap my head around what you are saying, you know what I'm saying? Because I know where you're coming from.

On the surface, a podcast about business presumably should be about, well, business. But we all experience things differently based on our identities. It impacts the way that we interact with people, how we move through the world and how we are treated. The personal is political. As the panelist stated, White men may "talk from an experience that I won't be able to achieve unless I do all these other things that he's never even had to consider." One of the reasons, presumably, that these women could not relate to these podcasts is that the White male hosts speak from their own experiences, which presumably do not involve the lack of resources that Black entrepreneurs experience. They may not have considered the ways that their privilege impacts the advice they give and how they achieved their specific business success. They are usually not socialized to

examine their privilege in this way. But as Black women, the hosts recognized that their multiple marginalized identities will impact how they experience the business world, and they recognized the importance of being able to hear this perspective in the business advice that they received.

These Black women podcasters are also able to take this perspective when crafting their shows, because they are able to consider marginalized listeners who are also searching for shows with perspectives that closely mirror their own. In the following excerpt, Diamond of *Marsha's Plate* discusses the familiarity and impact of hearing voices that reflect her own:

> Anything that came up, oh, that was a space that you couldn't wait to go to. Kinda like in regards to our podcast, I can't wait until...I couldn't wait to hear you guys' opinion. It's the same thing like...we couldn't wait to come to the beauty shop to see what our stylist was saying, what the customer that just has no appointment when I have an appointment, what she's going to say.

In the above excerpt, Diamond frames the importance of hearing voices that listeners are actively excited to listen to and hear. Hearing those particular voices, she insists, is exciting and "a space that you couldn't wait to go to." As a podcast listener and fan, I have often said (and have heard others say), that my favorite podcasts are like listening to a conversation with old friends. More specifically, when a significant Black cultural event happens, as Diamond says, I always look forward to tuning into my favorite podcasts to hear more about what they think of the event. Fox et. al (2020) describe how Black podcasts can serve as a curriculum or guide of sorts to understanding Black communities and their responses to cultural events, such as when *Black Panther*

was released in 2018. Black podcasts "create inclusive space for public discourse on race" (p. 304).

This will be further reiterated in this project's fourth chapter, which centers the *Surviving R.Kelly* docuseries. When the docuseries first aired, the first thing I thought was, 'I can't wait to hear what podcasts have to say about this!'. The hosts are aware that they are creating spaces where their marginalized listeners can feel seen and heard. In other words, they have an opinion that the listeners can relate to, that is culturally aware and provides unique content that they can't get anywhere else because of the uniqueness of that voice. These podcasts are centering issues that are prevalent in Black popular culture, but may not be seen as important or relevant enough within mainstream media.

MARGINALIZE THIS

In recreating Black woman-centered spaces through their podcasts, these hosts are further privileging a specific niche group of listeners and showing how to authentically grow and sustain this community. They know the best ways to keep these listeners engaged in an authentic and natural way because they are part of these communities themselves. They know what will appeal to them, and they also understand the significance of why these kinds of spaces matter. Within this panel, as they discuss the ways that they center Black women, we also see the range of diversity in the group and the larger impact of these kinds of spaces within different communities. On this panel, there were several queer Black women, an immigrant, and a Black trans woman. These women hailed from various parts of the country (and world). These podcast hosts cater to

a wide range of Black woman-centered communities, echoing the multitude of Black womanhood. In the below excerpt, Diamond from *Marsha's Plate* discusses the ways that Black beauty shops were safe havens for her prior to her transition as a trans woman.

> I think it was a beauty shop. I think that because I was a queer young male at the time, like prior to my transition, that was a space that we...where my queerness wasn't judged and I had something to offer. I can do hair and I can have fashion and they allowed me into the space. And then so when I transitioned I was already a part of the space and they were like, 'You know, you should have been came out. You should have. We knew this was going to happen.' And you know it's kind of the same thing when my mother was…'You know we knew you before...I knew you before you actually told me. I was just kind of waiting on you.'

Within this space, Diamond felt welcomed, accepted and affirmed. Black beauty and barber shops have historically been safe havens and important community building locations. These spaces have been key in developing Black political thought and cultural expressions. In an earlier excerpt, she says that she would look forward to going to the shop and hearing the opinions and the conversations that would be present. As part of the community, Diamond could participate in these conversations and understand what was being said. Within the shop, a community space was built that centered and affirmed their intersectional identities and world views. The podcasts seek to replicate these kinds of spaces. This isn't to say that these spaces are monolithic, where all Black women feel as welcomed and affirmed as Diamond did. As stated previously, Blackness is not a monolithic identity and neither is Black womanhood. There can be ruptures in the fabric of the community when members do not fit the core group's identity. In response to being

asked to identify safe spaces for Black women that she'd been part of, Money describes her experience in the following excerpt.

> I was tryna think and it's kinda sad that I was like...I don't think ever. Like...to just be talking in a room with Black women safely. So then I started kind of reflecting on spaces that we had to make safe. And I remember, actually the first one that popped in my head was being kicked out of a sorority event because I was wearing pants. And it just comes to happen that like everybody who got kicked out was queer in some way and so you know, we were standing in the hallway of this sorority convention: Black queer women making sense of ourselves in that moment.

So in this excerpt, Money describes how even within a gathering of Black women, she did not feel safe and able to speak freely. She discusses how she and others subverted the space that essentially was set to serve as a "punishment" of sort for wearing pants and refusing a traditional feminine fashion expression. The hallway served as the space of punishment or banishment, a way of saying 'You are not welcome here.' The hallway was the margins and the other women who complied with the sorority's idea of femininity were rewarded with being able to participate in the event. But what was intended to be a shaming event turned out to be a communal moment for those who used their queerness and marginalized identity to form a bond over this now shared experience of displacement.

Money and Diamond's experiences intersect with their queer and trans identities, respectively. They are both Black women but have experienced these Black-women centered spaces in unique ways. They bring these experiences to both of their podcasts that have specific intended audiences. Diamond's podcast, *Marsha's Plate*, centers Black trans listeners, while *Queer WOC* centers queer women of color, specifically Black

women. As podcasts are able to cater towards niche audiences, this panel represents a distinct subset of podcasts hosted by a truly diverse group of Black women. The identities that they hold impact their lived experiences and impact the ways that they approach their shows. In response to several of the panelists saying that they could not relate to business podcasts hosted by White men, who were not thinking of them as the intended audience, Diamond complicates this notion further and describes how being trans impacts the kind of business-minded advice that could be applicable to her (and other trans listeners).

> Sometimes mindset is not enough. Sometimes as a Black trans woman when I come into a space, that title can stop me from getting opportunities. It doesn't matter how happy and enthusiastic and 'Oh my God, I can do this and I got this.' The mindset that I have coming in it...it doesn't matter. If they are...if they don't accept who I am and they don't accept me...then it's not gonna happen and my mindset doesn't determine that at all.

The above excerpt reflects the harsh lived experiences of many Black trans women, and it is a perspective that is not heard often within mainstream media. Diamond continues by describing how she views her podcast as a way to talk back to extremely harmful and hurtful narratives.

> One of my favorite African proverbs is, 'It's not until the lion learns to write that the narrative will always glorify the hunter.' So I started [my podcast] because when I was searching for people who were like me, I couldn't find them. I couldn't see them. Or there was these weird stories. So we know that Black...well, if you don't know: Black trans women are being murdered at astronomical rates. And so the narrative usually is they a) were prostituting...um...they were tricking somebody and if you live this life you know that's not the truth. That's just not. And so that's a narrative that the media and all of that kind of stuff...so I feel like if I tell my story and I tell...I didn't...if I tell the experience that I had you would know a real version of my life. And a person who is like me can find me and say, 'Oh I know this person. Oh, this is me. I went through the same thing. How did you go through it?' When I got fired from my job simply for being trans, not because I didn't do my job well, not because I was Black, not because it...it was specifically said to me because I was trans and I was causing a problem, and

> because I lived in a state that didn't have protections. Indiana. I didn't have protection....And so I wanted to be that voice where somebody like me was in a situation, they didn't have to go down the path where I've already learned how to get out of. And so that was...that's what oral tradition is about.

In this excerpt, Diamond discusses why her specific identity is important within trans representation. She created *Marsha's Plate*--named after Black trans activist Marsha P. Johnson and inspired by Solange's album *A Seat At The Table* (2016)--to illuminate the experiences of Black trans people. These perspectives were absent in much of mainstream media, and what was represented did not fully reflect her own experiences. So for her, a podcast provided a space to talk back to those narratives and insert herself and those who share her identities into spaces where they were missing. But in having her own platform, she did not have to replicate those spaces where she did not feel seen. Instead, she was able to create a platform where she was indeed centered and did not have to concern herself with the cisgendered gaze. Diamond also says, "You get past the gatekeepers. So because we have a Soundcloud, because we have a Youtube, we don't have to come and be perfect for the television to come and say 'Oh! We're gonna give you a shot.' We can just create our own shots."

THERE'S A STORY IN OUR VOICE

As a diverse group of Black women, the hosts speak from a particular perspective and with particular voices. In the following excerpt, Money discusses the importance and relevance of speaking in an authentic way and how it intentionally draws connections between them and their listeners.

> I'm a therapist and it's really important for me to talk the way I talk. I talked about this when I was a guest on y'alls podcast. No amount of credentials or anything is gonna take away the way I talk. I'm a Black girl and it's very important for me to also keep this voice and to not try to code-switch or assimilate...If there is some girl out there who is considering being anything...be a social worker, psychologist, anything...if she turns on my podcast and hears me talking about mental health, in this voice, like 'this bitch doing it?' Like you know, 'I like that! Where I sign up?!" That's very important.

Money's insistence that it is important for her to speak "in this voice" is a crucial and valid point of being able to authentically connect with audiences. The voice that she is describing is unique and not one that is readily heard in mainstream media, due to the inherent racism and sexism that privileges the White male, supposedly unmarked voice. During the panel, Money describes how as a Black woman from New York, she speaks in a specific tone and accent. As Money says, it is important for her to speak in this particular voice because it resonates with listeners who recognize their own accents and identities in her sound. Our voices reveal a lot about us—for instance, what geographic region we are from, the communities we belong to. So-called standard voices that are void of those characteristics sound uniform and frankly, bland. But hearing someone with a similar accent, or someone who uses slang that lets you know what part of the country (or world they are from) helps to make a solid, authentic connection. For instance, when I hear someone say 'pop' instead of 'soda,' I can guess that they are either from the Midwest or have some sort of tie to the Midwest.

> Money: There's power in the voice. So even if I haven't had the experiences that you've had like... the way my voice sounds, the way J's voice sounds, the way our voices sound, they tell a story within themselves. You know? And it's like... Well I can connect to that. So that's what I wanna be a part of.

Our voices reveal a lot about who we are, which is of particular importance especially for those whose voices have been marginalized or are not considered the "default" or "standard" voice, which has been echoed by many of the panelists. They chose to not remove their accents or other markers that are part of their identity, specifically because these markers help their audiences identify themselves.

Money states that our voices have stories. Our voices have multitudes and they tell so much about who we are. Our voices can also replicate what is considered to be professional, which is often steeped in anti-Blackness. Earlier, Money echoes this when saying that it is important for her to sound the way she does as a therapist. She is clearly uninterested in assimilating to fit a certain ideal of how a therapist should sound. There will be no objectivity in her voice when dealing with her clients, and she acknowledges the relevance of this in connecting to clients who might sound similar to her. She can serve as a model for what it looks like to not have to give up part of your identity for your career.

The way that our voices sound can reflect important parts of our identity. In an article that I wrote for *Bitch* magazine (2020)[9], J says the following about the importance of not changing or editing speech patterns. "Depending on where you're from, [some] Black girls [make] a certain clicking sound before making a point or after saying something. We don't edit it out as much because there's a story in that sound." That clicking sound is one that as a Black girl, I am very familiar with. I do it, and so do most

[9] https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/podcasts-audio-enclaves-black-women

Black girls that I know. I do it without thinking--I didn't even realize it was something that I did until J described it. Now I hear it all the time, whether it is in my own speech or while talking to other Black women. Hearing Queen and J do it on their podcasts was comforting and sounded familiar to me. It further made me feel that I was sitting in on a conversation that could have taken place between me and my friends in one of our living rooms. Below, Laura says more about the story of her own voice and what it reveals about how other people see her:

> You know, I think it's... it's interesting because I always said that there's this intersection of: I'm an immigrant. I have Caribbean parents. I grew up in the suburbs. And I have this voice. Very French sounding last name, so ***no one*** knows where I am. And interestingly ,this weekend five different people have said to me, all white men, where are you from? Because you have this non-accent. And for me that's also part of the...for one, why does it matter where I'm from? I'm talking (inaudible) words, I'm obviously in the business. Um…And I think part of the reason that I created *The Reset* and some of the people who have reached out have been similar people who are Caribbean... Who have... Or might be immigrants as well. A lot of Black English women, which is fantastic. My people. Um. But I think because I think because... I mean we have our own sort of unique perspective on the world because I have to straddle so many different worlds in business and in personal relationships. And so I wanted to create a... I wanted to essentially take those, create a voice, and a space where I can honestly talk about the hardest struggle I have, which is in business. And how do you navigate being a black woman in business?

Laura discusses her multiple identities and how they have influenced not only her lived experiences and how she moves through the world, but also the content on her podcast. She talks about how people are interested and curious in her immigrant status, of trying to figure her out. They are curious about her "non-accent." As shared above, there are stories in our voices. They can mark where we are geographically. The White men also attending the conference and trying to place Laura are looking for clues, markers, to

determine where she is from, to make sense of her. One way they think they can do this is by trying to place her accent to get an idea of where they think she is from. But the "non-accent" does not reveal where she is "from," which further confuses them. Our voices hold stories and reveal much about our identities, and in this instance, are a sonic marker to the White men that Laura does not belong "here."

The insistence on knowing where she is from and assumption that she is not from "here" (America), that she stands out as not one of them. These kinds of experiences stand out as things that she has to experience as a Black woman in business trying to make her way in a world not built or designed with her in mind. Other Black women in business presumably have similar experiences of people trying to figure them out, or just of feeling marginalized and learning how to navigate a world and system not built or designed for them. The desire to know where she is from is also a questioning of her credentials, to question if she indeed belongs in business or if there is a place for her there and is steeped in xenophobia. Laura echoes this when she says "Why does it matter where I'm from? I'm obviously in the business." Again, it is a way to make sense of who she is and her place within the business world. She has to learn how to navigate the business world, while as she says, straddling many different worlds. Listeners who are also interested in learning more about having a business while navigating marginalized identities will appreciate and be able to relate to her specific story and perspective. Host of *The Naked Beauty*, Brooke discusses the significance of hearing the beauty regiments of Black women and how these stories shape her podcast:

> I do think that there is kind of oral tradition around beauty that I hope to bring into *The Naked Beauty* and the show that I can do, but also I think that there's... And maybe I just started this podcast because I'm nosy about women's beauty routines. Like Nikeeta, I want to know where you get your hair cut, like I want to know how you added those blue at the end. Like you guys all have like amazing and beautiful skin... There's something about women just talking about self-presentation and self-expression, right? Because I think a lot of times people that speak out in the beauty space go to YouTube, right? Or Pinterest. And that's like the Highlight Reel. No one's going to talk about how their twist out was like the biggest fail ever. And their gel from their wash and go won't stop flaking. And they can't find foundation to their skin tone. Thank you, Fenty for fixing that. But like...there is an opportunity to record what's happening in terms of how we self-present that's not just like the glossy, perfect makeup tutorial.

In the above excerpt from Brooke, she discusses the oral tradition in Black women discussing their beauty routines and processes, and makes the clear distinction of how podcasts, which allow for deeper conversation and dialogue, differ from the beauty tutorials that have become popular on YouTube. Brooke says that she enjoys hearing about the routines of Black women, which is important because the personal is always political. So she can relate to other Black women celebrating being able to find foundation that matches their skintone, which is a serious issue that only recently has been rectified by companies like Fenty Beauty, which is helmed by singer Rihanna. Beauty can seen as frivolous a topic as it is usually relegated to conversations by women and as a way to downplay its significance but on Brooke's podcast, the beauty journeys of Black women in particular are taken seriously and discussed with great care.

DISCUSSION

This particular panel took place at SXSW, and the panelists acknowledge throughout the episode that it is taking place in front of a majority White audience.

Although they say they are speaking “Black girl shit,” and they center Black women throughout the entire episode, I can’t help but wonder if there were still things that they held back on discussing because of who their audience is. For Queen and J, they acknowledge that they have a robust listenership of White women who write into the show and thank them for the content that they provide. But does this change the dynamics of the episode? Would the conversation have been different if it had a majority Black and female audience?

One of the other limiting factors of this panel being part of a recorded episode is that we can’t be sure if the episode was condensed or edited. This panel being presented at an expensive media festival raises several challenges, particularly around accessibility. On the one hand, having it at a prestigious media festival legitimizes the idea that the industry should be paying attention to Black women in podcasting. It gives the podcasters the opportunity to network and meet other podcasters and those who perhaps also hold marginalized identities and beliefs. But if we’ve already established that the podcast industry is White and dominated by White men, they will more than likely have been the ones in the audience when this panel was occurring. Are they the ones that need to hear this panel? Should they have access to their Black girl shit, while other podcasters of color, and specifically Black women, who don’t have access to SXSW would have to wait for the episode to premiere. In discussing “Black girl shit” together with such a diverse group of Black women, we get a mix of perspectives from the group and how this has impacted their podcasting experience.

This panel was put together to highlight the experiences of Black women podcast hosts. Although they make up a small percentage of podcast hosts, that number continues to grow and climb, particularly as podcasts increases in popularity. With this panel, media and more specifically podcast industry insiders were able to hear more about the specific experiences and motivators for this group of Black female podcasters. These podcasters hold multiple marginalized identities—Black, female, queer, trans, immigrant, etc. Through their podcasts, they are able to speak directly to how they move through and make sense of the world while holding these identities.

There are stories in our voices. Each of these hosts bring unique and specific experiences to their podcasts and likely to listeners who can either identify or empathize with the stories that they share. In Money, listeners can hear a professional therapist who intentionally speaks with an accent that shows where she's from and reveals different parts of her identity. In Laura, listeners who are also immigrants can hear her affirm that she does indeed belong "here," staking her place in the business world as a Black woman and as someone not from this country.

Diamond shares that she created the *Marsha's Plate* podcast to have more control of the narrative put out about the experiences of trans people. So through her podcast, she is able to expand the media offerings that center Black trans people. In this regard, *Marsha's Plate* and other marginalized podcasts like it:

> make audible struggles for representation, challenge institutional colonialisms, and traverse both the political landscape and lived experiences of racialized oppressions. Thus, the podcasting space differentiates itself…in terms of its potential to produce narratives that oppose exclusionary forms of representations

> and politics found in talk radio, opinion journalism and current affairs programming (Vrikki and Malik,

CONCLUSION

In gathering a group of Black women podcasters, Queen and J demanded that we listen to Black women. Listen to their voices and listen to their experiences. But this panel also encouraged us to *listen* to the podcasts of Black women. Black female podcasters are still a marginalized group within the podcast landscape, which affirms that we should be listening to what they have to say.

Black women speak from specific locations and experiences, and this is reflected in their podcasts. The affordances of podcasts, as a medium that encourages in depth conversations and grants the freedom to cater to niche audiences, make them an attractive medium for creatives who hold marginalized identities. In catering to niche audiences, Black women podcasters and other marginalized hosts can decide how to enact and enforce boundaries to identify just who their podcasts are for, through the strategic decisions to not use explanatory commas. As Solange sweetly crooned, 'This shit is for us.' Explanatory commas can be useful in providing further context for listeners, but the decision to not use them can also benefit those who are familiar with the topic and don't need an explanation. In this way, Black podcasts enact boundaries around who can fully participate as a listener. The podcasts are on public platforms and available to anyone who has access but being able to comprehend with prior cultural knowledge makes the experience different.

Our voices reflect our varied lived experiences—our tones, accents, etc. reveal intimate parts of who we are. Our accents can show where we are from. Our tones can be relatable to those looking for perspectives that mirror their own.

Chapter 3: Black Joy Headquarters

The Black Joy Mixtape podcast: Track #54: #MeTooRemastered

Jazmine Walker: So we back in the Black Joy Headquarters. Y'all know we living this charmed life out here.

Amber J. Phillips: Charmed ass life at the studio.

J: Because our plug of an engineer has decided that he is going to learn some more things.

A: Shoutout to Morgan out here at Transom. Learning how to be the best fucking audio creator.

J: Person

A: In the world just out here being excellent.

J: And of course it will be one of our trans siblings to usher us into this great era of audio.

A: Amen.

J: Primary sources.

A: Yes. A sonic shifting.

J: So we really really proud of him. And I can't believe this is how I'm spending my Easter.

(They both start laughing)

J: In front of one mic, crouched all over, back all hurting and shit.

A: Listen…

J: I rose today. I shouldn't have to do this.

A: You did rise. You gone be GRATEFUL!

J: Come back Morgan.

A: Come back Morgan! We miss you.

J: I can't bend over.

A: I wanna be in the studio.

J: I'm a person of means now. The life of which I have become accustomed to.

A: Oh my god.

J: The Black Joy Jubilee gone be talking about 'why yall sound like that?' Ugh...because you ain't been giving to the Paypal.

A: Ugh you better put some money in the motherfucking Paypal.

The above lines are from the cold open of *The Black Joy Mixtape* podcast, track #54 titled "MeTooReMastered: Be Careful With Us". It is a typical exchange between hosts Amber J. Phillips and Jazmine Walker, and is representative of most of the opening segments of the show. In this particular opening, the two are lamenting about being back in the Black Joy Headquarters--Amber's living room--where they record most of the episodes. Across several episodes, the two have discussed former guest and fellow podcaster Morgan Givens[10]' connection to formal studio time that he shared with them so the duo could record episodes. This episode, however, was recorded back in Amber's living room instead of a studio, and this comical exchange shows them mourning the loss of their professional resources.

I first discovered *The Black Joy Mixtape* in 2016, after Phillips appeared on the popular radio show *The Breakfast Club* alongside journalist Jamilah Lemieux. Radio personality Charlemagne Tha God caused controversy when he amplified conservative

[10] Givens hosted the podcast *Flyest Fables* (independent; 2018-2020).

White blogger Tomi Lahren, who he claimed built a platform that Black women should in turn use as a model to build their own platforms. At the time, Amber was also an occasional political commentator on *News One Now,* hosted by journalist Roland Martin. While on *The Breakfast Club*, Amber discussed *The Black Joy Mixtape* and I was immediately intrigued. She held her own, alongside Lemieux, while affirming the many Black women with existing platforms who rightfully took offense to Charlemagne's dismissal of their work. While on the show, Phillips plugged *The Black Joy Mixtape*, and I began listening immediately.

One listen to "Jaz da K.O.S. (King of the South)" and "Amber, the High Priestess of Black Joy" and it became very apparent that this was not your average political podcast. Jazmine, a proud Southerner and native of Jackson, MS, speaks in a Southern drawl that is very familiar to me as I have spent over a decade living in Southern states. Amber, a native of Columbus, OH, frequently spoke about how her activism impacted her personal politics and challenged many of her thoughts around gender and sexuality. Together, the hosts of *The Black Joy Mixtape*, created a show that centered Black feminism, wellness and politics for the average, everyday listener. The two were intentional about the way they spoke, emphasizing the importance of accessibility. In the previous chapter, Money (co-host of *Queer WOC)* echoed this same sentiment of being intentional with speaking in her New York accent to signal to listeners a sense of familiarity.

The podcast has been on an unexplained indefinite hiatus since October 2018, which speaks to the precariousness of being an independent podcast with no institutional support or resources.

The podcast is presented as a mixtape--each episode is listed as a track. According to the podcast's Instagram page, the hosts "pop their trunk to deliver hot 16s on pop culture, news and politics." The cover image for the show is an image of Amber and Jazmine on top of a cd cover, with a "Parental Advisory" label to warn of the explicit content inside. "Legitimate" music, ideally, would not be sold out of a trunk, much less without the backing of a record label (although in the digital era, that could be contested). But mixtapes are special records for those reasons. They may not have the best sound quality--depending on the resources available to the artist, studio time which can be costly may not have been available, similar to *The Black Joy Mixtape*. But that gritty sound that comes from an unpolished, makeshift studio adds character and grit to the project, similar to the podcast. Although Amber and Jazmine jokingly state that their listeners will notice the lack of audio quality when they are not recording in the studio, as a listener I disagree. The episodes recorded in "The Black Joy Headquarters" of Amber's living room are my most favorite--the imperfect sounds, knowing that they are recording in the intimate space of her home, adds a layer of depth that is not achieved in the professional space of a recording studio.

Jazmine and Amber have both discussed their experiences with activism and organizing. The podcast is an extension of this activism. Modeling the podcast after a mixtape aligns it with hip hop and a grassroots movement. Mixtapes are usually

independently sold by the artist as a way to garner attention and build their audience. There is (usually) not a large label backing mixtapes, making such media products a homegrown effort. Aligning the podcast with mixtape culture also makes explicit who the ideal audience is--as the popular saying states, "for the culture"--meaning for a Black audience with interests that center Black communities.

The Black Joy Mixtape is presented as an explicitly Black feminist podcast. The hosts directly state this repeatedly in almost every episode. But more importantly, the topics covered, the guests featured and the formatting of the show espoused feminist ideals. In the words of hip hop group Migos, they "walked it like they talked it." The podcast provides rich material to think through what a Black feminist podcast sounds like and how it distinctly models itself as such.

[11]Episode Title	Length	Participants
Track #24: An Abortion Story Ft. Micha'le (May 5, 2017)	1:04:55	Amber, Jazmine, Micha'le
Track #54: MeTooRemastered: Be Careful with Us (April 12, 2018)	1:15:32	Amber, Jazmine
Track #59: I'm Worthy Ft. Black Femme Brunch (Sept. 7, 2018)		Amber, Jazmine, Jos, Juh Nay

Table 2: Detailed descriptions of the episodes featured in this chapter.

[11] Episode descriptions were not available on Soundcloud or Apple Podcasts, as only three episodes remained available for listening. The audio for these episodes was retrieved before this happened.

I fell in love with podcasts out of desperation. I spent almost five years on a hellish commute that would sometimes last for two hours one way. In both of my graduate cohorts, I was the only Black person and Black woman. (Eventually more Black girls would join.) It took a lot of mental preparation to enter those spaces, and even more mental preparation to process each occurrence on the drive back home. Podcasts saved me. The voices of Black people, particularly Black women, saved me.

Amber and Jazmine's voices filled my car each week and sounded just like the Black girls in my life I was desperately missing--Phillips even attended a women's college like I did. They easily switched back and forth between using Black vernacular and using Black feminist terminology that I was very familiar with. One of the rightfully so critiques of feminism is its lack of accessibility as a body of knowledge steeped in academia, and Walker and Phillips never hesitated to address this by outright calling it out and explaining complex terms in ways that were easily digestible for their everyday listeners.

The hosts theorized about Black joy and pleasure by using their lived experiences as Black women to contextualize current events. The show tackled major political events while centering the impact that it would have on Black folks, specifically Black women, femmes and nonbinary folks. Phillips and Walker combined Black feminism, pop culture and political analysis in a way that echoed Melissa Harris Perry's canceled eponymous MSNBC show, but with twerk music and much more cursing.

Three episodes of this intentional Black feminist space will be analyzed in this chapter. In these episodes, explicit Black feminist themes will be addressed. Walker and

Phillips bring their friend Micha'le as a guest to discuss her abortion while they record the episode in Phillips' living room. On another episode, Walker enters the #MeToo conversation and discusses her sexual assault by a former partner. Lastly, the duo highlight the Black Femme Brunch, a gathering in the Washington, D.C. area centering Black queer and feminine-expressed people and interview the co-founders of the event.

First, I will explore how Phillips and Walker center the voices, experiences and stories of Black women. In these episodes--an abortion story, a rape testimony and a discussion about gender and sexual expression--Black women's voices are centered. What does this sound like? Why is this important? Within these episodes, Phillips and Walker reimagine new worlds where Black women are listened to, and their needs and desires are centered. We see this when in response to Micha'le lamenting on not being able to choose her abortion provider, Phillips imagines an abortion space where support people are allowed, and where parents could receive spa-like services. Lastly, *The Black Joy Mixtape* was intentional about recreating sacred and intimate spaces for Black people. Scholars have described beauty and barber shops and churches as sacred Black spaces, and claimed that digital spaces have recreated the norms and customs of these spaces. I argue that podcasts are more intimate, and the living room or kitchen space in which the podcast is recorded lends itself to fostering a sense of intimacy.

In this chapter, three episodes of the podcast will be closely analyzed as case studies utilizing textual analysis and close listening through the lens of Black feminist theorizing. I return here to Katharine McKittrick's notion of "the last place they thought of" to help guide the analysis present in this chapter. In thinking through the sounds of a

Black feminist podcast, “the last place they thought of” represents a space both highly surveilled and simultaneously left alone, considered unimportant. Black women are both hyper visible and ignored. Black women are seen but not listened to.

Incorporating Black feminist thought into this research allows me to privilege my own connection to the research as a methodology. Being an avid listener of these podcasts allows me to be familiar with the norms of the show, particularly with the episode in which Jazmine uses the platform to discuss her sexual assault. This episode was particularly impactful because Jazmine was especially vulnerable in sharing her story and intentionally using her platform to bring awareness to survivors’ perspectives. Throughout this chapter, I will include my own responses to the impact of hearing Black women’s voices in this way, to highlight my own experiences as a listener and to echo the importance of their perspectives.

BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT: THE LAST PLACE THEY THOUGHT OF

The Black Joy Mixtape is a Black feminist, political and cultural analysis podcast. The hosts espouse Black feminist ideals in each episode. What exactly does this mean? Scholar and Black feminist thought forerunner Patricia Hill Collins offers the following definition of Black feminist thought:

> Black feminist thought consists of ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women. [This] definition assumes that Black women possess a unique standpoint on, or perspective of, their experiences and that there will be certain commonalities of perception shared by Black women as a group...universal themes included in the Black women’s standpoint may be expressed and experienced differently by distinct groups of Afro-American women...while a Black women’s standpoint exists, its contours may not be clear to Black women themselves. Therefore, one role for the Black female intellectual

> is to produce facts and theories about the Black female experience that will clarify a Black woman's standpoint for Black women.

This expression of a Black woman's standpoint is evident throughout each episode analyzed in this chapter. Amber and Jazmine use their lived experiences to further contextualize how Black women and other marginalized folks experience oppressive situations due to their various marginalized identities.

In expressing a Black woman's standpoint at the center of the podcast, I argue that the podcast also speaks from a specific location, building upon Black feminist geographer Katharine McKittrick's concept of "the last place they thought of." McKittrick's theorization about the last place they thought of builds upon the harrowing experience of the formerly enslaved Harriet Brent Jacobs, who hid in a garret within her grandmother's home for seven years in order to avoid capture. From her hiding space in the garret, Jacobs gained a unique perspective and vantage point. She became privy to things not intended for her eyes and ears, precisely because she was in "the last place they thought of." This location, McKittrick argues, allows for a Black feminist theorization around marginalization and the vantage point that comes from this.

> Within and through structural and ideological racism-sexism, black feminists have provided texts, theories, activist work, and political agendas that specify the resistances and accomplishments of black women. Rebellions, slave narratives, fiction, political work, feminist/womanist criticism, and academic endeavors, are just some off the ways in which black feminists have responded to and analyzed unequal sociopolitical relations...This critique is important because it discloses the multiple realities of racial, economic, and sexual oppressions and advances a progressive politics that conceptualizes "difference" beyond domination.

In Track #24 “An Abortion Story”, the hosts are joined by their friend Micha’le, who shares the story of her abortion. Micha’le came to Amber’s apartment (also The Black Joy Headquarters) to retrieve a pair of earrings. While there, she hopped on the mic to record her abortion story. Amber and Jazmine make mention of their dinner--fried chicken and rice--numerous times to normalize this particular storytelling as opposed to the abortion storytelling that happens at conferences, which are more controlled (and less accessible) spaces and environments.

In Track #54 “#MeTooRemastered,” Jazmine turns herself into the topic of discussion, or a “headline,” and shares her experience as a survivor of rape at the hands of her former partner. Jazmine’s partner, a sociology professor, had been in the spotlight writing commentary around toxic masculinity and consent, without addressing her allegations. In response, Jazmine wrote her own commentary detailing the abuse in addition to discussing it on her social media accounts, and utilizing *The Black Joy Mixtape* platform to further contextualize the abuse, providing a larger intersectional lens for the #MeTooMovement.

Lastly, in Track #59 “I’m Worthy ft. Black Femme Brunch,” the hosts are joined by the founders of the Washington, D.C.-based social club Black Femme Brunch. They promote Black Femme Brunch and use the discussion to have a larger conversation around gender and sexuality for Black women, femmes and nonbinary folks. Together, these episodes provide three different audio experiences surrounding Black feminism.

I will begin with a discussion about the importance of listening to and hearing Black women’s voices. As stated before, what does a Black feminist podcast sound like?

What is the importance of hearing Black women's voices discussing these particular issues? In close listening to these episodes, I pay attention to the laughter, the silences and words used. Listening to Black women embody the space of "the last place they thought of." Next, I will move towards how these episodes imagine different worlds, through a Black feminist lens. In these worlds, the needs, hopes and desires of Black women and those with marginalized gender identities are expressed and centered, ending with the Black Femme Brunch showing what this looks like in practice. Finally, I will focus on the ways that sacred spaces are upheld and replicated within the podcasts: The Black Joy Headquarters being located in Amber's living room and kitchen. These spaces are sacred and have been key healing and gathering spaces for Black folks, but especially Black women. Recording a podcast within these spaces replicates this sacred and intimate environment.

LISTENING TO BLACK WOMEN'S VOICES

"I had to find my voice, I'm a Black girl from Columbus, OH and I talk a certain kind of way and we need more people who sound like me talking politics."- Amber J. Phillips

I discovered *The Black Joy Mixtape* soon after I started listening to *The Read.* Their voices would fill my car on the long and isolating commute that I took after hours spent in classes where I was routinely the only Black person present. New episodes were usually released on Fridays--listening to the latest episode was the perfect way to close out my week and mark the end of my commute. I cherished hearing their voices--the laughter between the hosts and the occasional guests that would appear; the trap music that played during the intro. It felt like I was sitting right in one of my friend's living

rooms, having the kind of conversation that can easily go from recommendations of hair products to talking about the latest political scandal. Scholar Sarah Florini discusses how particularly for Black folks moving in physical spaces and communities that are not inclusive, podcasts can become audio enclaves or cocoons, enveloping them in the familiar sounds of Black social spaces. Listening to *The Black Joy Mixtape* on Friday afternoons turned my car into a comforting space as I decompressed on my long drive home.

In the above quote, tweeted from the podcast's official Twitter account, Amber discusses the importance of diversity of thought in political spaces. As a Black girl who is also from the Midwest, I identify deeply with Amber's sentiment. Amber and I are also both graduates of women's colleges. Being a Women's Studies graduate of a women's college certainly impacted how I crafted my voice--and how I was actively encouraged to find my voice and speak up. I imagine that Amber may have had a similar experience.

Amber also discusses "speaking a certain way." She and Jazmine have specific accents and locations from which they speak. Jazmine has a noticeable Southern accent--Mississippi to be exact. But beyond their geographical locations, Jazmine and Amber both code switch fluidly. They curse, use slang, make cultural references and speak in Black vernacular. But they can also switch to speaking more "standard" English depending on the topic, which is intentional. The code switching serves the purpose of speaking to a variety of Black communities who will be familiar with the language being used, while also speaking to a more broad audience who may not understand the Black vernacular but certainly understand the standard English used. Code switching has been a

survival mechanism for many Black people in spaces where Whiteness is universal and standard. Choosing to code switch can be a form of assimilation but it can also be a form of resistance--it shows that the speaker is versatile and can easily slip into multiple environments. The ability to translate multiple environments is key for surviving a world where Whiteness and ideals connected to Whiteness dominate. Code switching is also a nod to the intended audience--either you get it or you don't.

The idea of being able to slip into different environments reflects back on the "last place they thought of." It shows an ability to understand multiple perspectives and speak to multiple audiences, which is a crucial skill for Black women navigating spaces where they do not see themselves represented. Being able to code switch is also a crucial skill for Black podcast hosts because they can use it to signal when they are solely speaking to their Black audience, and when they are speaking to their non-Black and/or White audience who they see as guests and not members of their listening community.

On *The Black Joy Mixtape*, the conversations between Black women are treated as intimate, valued and sacred. Amber's sentiment about hearing from girls who sound like her rings true for a multitude of reasons. Hearing Black girls who sound like Amber being a supportive friend while Jazmine shows vulnerability and strength while discussing her sexual assault is key in showing the depth of friendship between women.

Hearing Micha'le discuss her abortion story while having dinner in Amber's living room is a radical shift in thinking through how abortion stories are shared. The three women laugh and cackle when Micha'le describes breezing past her then-boyfriend and protestors outside the abortion clinic so she wouldn't be late for her appointment.

Amber encourages Micha'le to tell her story in her own voice, without worrying about if she uses the proper terms to describe the abortion procedure. The following is an excerpt from the episode.

The Black Joy Mixtape Track #24

> Amber: Even the fact that like Micha'le is on the mic because we are just like sitting here eating chicken wings. Sharing stories. What were we saying? We were just talking about Planned Parenthood in general. But we were just randomly talking and Micha'le was like, "Oh yeah, when I was at Planned Parenthood to have an abortion.." and we're like "tell us more, would you like to share it?"
>
> Jazmine: And she was so gracious to share it with us and has agreed to share it with you all. But what is most interesting or striking, and y'all hear this about like...it's abortion storytelling in a way that you would never just put it together.
>
> A: Yeah. And we have a lot of amazing friends who actually...that's their advocacy work, is telling their abortion stories. Like our phenomenal friend Renee Bracy Sherman shares her abortion story, but also there's something to be said about Black women sharing abortion stories over chicken wings and rice.
>
> J: Right.
>
> A: And that is essentially what happened today. And I'm sure there are countless listeners who have done that or who should feel normalized in talking about that and that's how Micha'le has done it. So we're gonna talk about it.

In highlighting that this abortion story is taking place while eating chicken and rice, Amber and Jazmine are reinforcing that the trusted and familiar space of Amber's living room makes this difficult conversation somewhat easier and more relatable. It removes the stigma of women being shamed to discuss their abortions, and encourages these conversations to happen in safe, everyday spaces. With your homegirls, over a regular meal that you would have together anyway. Abortion speakouts are radical--it puts the abortion storytelling in a very direct and central space, in order for stories to be

amplified and told on a large platform. But not everyone has access to these kinds of spaces--they are controlled spaces, as is pointed out in the podcast since they usually happen at conferences, which are not free and not always advertised to a larger audience who isn't already familiar with the host organization.

But sharing an abortion story, in the middle of a friend's living room, can be a much safer and affirming experience. Listeners get to hear this conversation, hear this intimacy between friends. Amber and Jazmine affirm Micha'le as she shares her story. They listen, interject when necessary and bring a nuanced lens to Micha'le's story. They do a great job of pointing out that although this conversation is taking place in a regular setting, over a regular meal, there are some privileges that may have made Micha'le's story more privileged than another person's experience. As a Women's Studies major, Micha'le was already aware of the history of abortion access and prepared for the protestors that greeted her. She also acknowledged that as a graduate student with an internship, living in Washington, D.C., she had many options available to her in terms of clinics and being able to fund the abortion without the help of her then-partner.

But Micha'le's privileged status does not negate the power in hearing her speak about her experience, though it does impact that this conversation was happening in the first place. She knew two people who had a podcast, was not ashamed of her decision and open to talking about it without worrying of any potential consequences. This is one of the differences between having this conversation in the safe sacred space of a friend's living room and recording for a podcast episode.

IMPORTANCE OF *HEARING* BLACK WOMEN'S VOICES

In these episodes, the voices of Black women are centered and amplified. In Jazmine we hear a Southern drawl, and in Track #54, we hear bravery and transparency as she discusses her past abuse. In Amber we hear a woman challenging long-held beliefs, as in Track #59 when she discusses sitting with her rigid ideas about sexuality. In Track #59, we also hear a group of women discussing the ways that gender expression has unique challenges for Black femmes, as femininity has historically been steeped in a particular kind of expression relegated to White women.

As a Black woman, hearing other Black women discuss these topics is not only refreshing, but challenges my own thoughts and beliefs. I imagine new worlds right alongside them. I hear Black feminist thought put into action and brought to life from the pages of books that I've poured into over the years. It feels affirming to hear women who sound like me, or my cousin, or my best friends, speaking so confidently and lovingly about other Black women. It feels affirming to hear the laughter between them. It feels affirming to hear "the culture" represented in a space "for us, by us." I am a graduate of a historically Black women's college--one of only two colleges in the country that primarily serve Black women--and so often our professors would remind us of how special that space was--a space specifically for Black women. "This isn't like the rest of the world," they warned us. I didn't realize how much that would ring true, and how much I yearned for spaces like my alma mater, until I started listening to *The Black Joy Mixtape*. In the following excerpt, the group discusses the impact of discovering other

Black women and femmes standing in their own power, in their own Black femme identities.

Track #59: I'm Worthy (Featuring Black Femme Brunch)

> Amber: And I think that's...this is why all these experiences have meant so much to me, because again, once you start to question these things for yourself and how you're moving through the world. You realize there's tons of people who came before you to write the shit down, they talking about it on YouTube, it's in books. This history is there. Because when I think about femme, the first femme I ever met was um..
>
> Jaz: Quita Tinsley.
>
> A: Yes.
>
> Jaz: In Atlanta?
>
> A: In Atlanta at SPARK [Reproductive Justice NOW]. I had met her for the first time and she was so jarring to me because I had never really seen a fat dark skinned Black woman wearing a bright bold lip.
>
> Jaz: Shoutout to Quita who is now with SPARK South East.
>
> A: Yes. And like just sitting in front of her...I probably like..I just wanted to ask her all the questions like 'One: who told you you could wear a blue lipstick?' like…
>
> Jos/Juh: How do you get here?
>
> A: No...like how do you get here. Because as a kid like...it's interesting how everyone wants you to be feminine and femme presenting , but then in Black spaces when you add colorism, when you add size onto that, they start to police even what kind of femme you have access to.
>
> (all the women respond with a nonverbal sign of agreement. 'Right'. 'Mmmhmm')
>
> A: So for me learning more about queer theory and specifically femme culture, I started to understand it as, 'I can be femme with me at the center and not men'. Like Jazmine said, once you realize like...one: all the lies that they've told us

about our identity and who we can be and you start to expand that, it just opens you up to realizing that you can create whatever the fuck you want for your life. Including your gender, including how you move...like I can be a femme and not touch a heel. And still fuck y'all up and be a dom at the same time.

Jaz: And also you can be nonbinary and femme.

A: To have women just think of...not just women, have femmes just think of different ways to be in community with each other that gets more and more authentic and allows you to explore who the fuck you can be and who the fuck you are is just...Black girls are told in just multiple ways of who we cannot be. And lots of that is just...flat dab...just because we came into this world as women.

A: Black girls are literally losing out on liberation, freedom, and opportunities because of our gender and our race coming together on us.

In the above excerpt, the group discusses the impact of discovering other Black women and femmes who stand in their own truth, in their own Black identity. Amber describes her shock at seeing another fat[12] Black woman being feminine in a way that she had only associated with skinnier women. Amber's commentary on the limitations of Black femininity when other identities intersect, such as size and skin color, is an important contribution to the discussion of femininity and how Blackness uniquely intersects with the identity. Not only are there multiple ways of performing femininity, but intersecting identities also impact how certain bodies experience that femininity. Wearing bold and bright lipstick draws attention to the person wearing it, and even more attention to bodies that stand in stark contrast to who that bold lipstick is acceptable on. For Amber, seeing another Black woman who she related to rocking her bold lipstick proved to be a possibility model.

This instance is a further example of the importance of hearing from Black women. Black women's unique experiences are not monolithic. In the tradition of Black feminism, Black women not only speak truth to power but critique uneven systems of power. In the above quote, we hear a group of Black feminine-identified folks discussing the ways that being Black and feminine-identified has explicitly impacted how they move through the world, and how they have been policed to *not* move through the world, to not be.

Amber's question of, "Who told you…" in regards to the Black woman rocking her bold, blue lipstick is a powerful one. As a Black woman, I personally identified with this transparent moment. I can identify many of the instances (whether they were vocalized or implied) when I knew that I was *not* allowed to do those things. I recognize the pain, surprise and hope in Amber's question. "Who told you that it was okay to be exactly who you are, Black girl?" Unspoken in Amber's question is, who gave you permission to exist as freely as possible, because of, and not in spite of being a Black girl? This Black girl identity that is supposed to shackle you, comes with so many limitations, is actually the root of your liberation, of your freedom. How?

This moment really stands out and shows why it is important to hear these kinds of conversations, from this diverse group of Black women. They are speaking back to the limitations placed on them because of their gender, race, body type, geographical location, etc. It is important for other Black girls, like me, but especially for people who are not in this demographic, to hear what it sounds like for Black girls to shatter the limitations placed on them. Just like that Black woman gave Amber permission to be

unapologetically herself, Amber's admission, and the theme of the episode--I'm Worthy, gives listeners permission to do the same.

SACRED SPACES

Black social spaces such as the church, barbershop and beauty shop are key gathering tools in developing and sustaining Black communities. Within these spaces, Black folks are able to convene and discuss issues that are pertinent to their survival, well-being and maintenance of their communities. These spaces serve as protection from spaces where Black folks are not prioritized, particularly where the White gaze and anti-Blackness prevails.

The living room or the kitchen, both spaces in the home, are also key Black social spaces. They serve as intimate settings where small groups can gather as an extension of the larger, communal spaces. *The Black Joy Mixtape* is primarily recorded in Phillips' living room, affectionately referred to as "The Black Joy Headquarters." This is in stark contrast to "professional" podcasts that are recorded in studios--the acoustics sound much better and there is less background noise and echoes. But what the living room acoustics lack in professional settings, it makes up for in the increased level of intimacy due to being recorded in Phillips' home. Intimacy can be synonymous with safety. In speaking about issues that require safety, intimacy is crucial.

Amber and Jazmine are intentional about recreating the safe spaces they have cultivated with the Black women and femmes in their lives. That intimacy would feel different if it were not in the living room, if it were not in The Black Joy Headquarters. I

am very familiar with these kinds of spaces. I have been part of them all my life--whether it be with my mom and aunts, my best friends, the gathering space in my dorm at my women's HBCU. That connection comes from the encouragement to be open, the validation from being seen and heard, whether that is in long drawn out "Giiiiirrrrlll", laughter or uninterrupted space to share. Black women are routinely not listened to, not believed, and not centered. In these spaces, it is the complete opposite.

As Micha'le shares how her former partner was emotionally abusive and manipulated her while she went through her abortion, Amber and Jazmine both audibly express disgust at how Micha'le was treated. Amber responds with "MY BOO! I COULD BEAT HIS ASS RIGHT NOW! UGH. These niggas." With this statement, Amber affirms that Micha'le did not deserve the treatment she received and expresses solidarity with her. When Jazmine gets emotional as she discusses how she contemplated suicide after she was raped, Amber does not interrupt her as she struggles to collect her thoughts. The silences in those moments are uncomfortable but reflect the natural flow of conversations. Again, this helps to recreate these spaces as intimate and sacred.

So what does it mean that these conversations are recorded and shared with a much larger audience? Does it become less intimate, less sacred? The initial conversations happen during a specific timeframe and location--Micha'le's conversation, for example, happens on a Wednesday evening in an apartment in Washington, D.C. between three Black women. Listeners are able to hear the conversation as presented on the episode, but are not invited to the recording, which is then allowed to remain sacred. When Walker shares her story about her rape, it is initially between she and Phillips, who

is her cohost but in this moment, is also a trusted friend who she says she has discussed multiple aspects of this story with before. The episode will later be heard by those who choose to listen to it, but we are only able to listen and react to the recorded episode, not the conversation while it takes place. In being able to listen to these intimate conversations, listeners are able to be privy to an uninterrupted conversation where Black women are centered and privileged. This is unfortunately not a common occurrence in mainstream media, even as these episodes recreate conversations that happen in living rooms and kitchens across the country.

Throughout the episodes, Amber and Jazmine make note of the quality of the sound when they record in the studio as opposed to when recording in Amber's living room. They do not give the official backstory as to how they obtained recording space, but anecdotally, they have referred to being gifted access to a studio by their friend and former guest on the podcast, Morgan Givens. In the below exchange, Amber and Jazmine discuss being back in the studio and the difference that they hear in the quality of their voice.

Track #59: I'm Worthy (Featuring Black Femme Brunch)

> Amber: We are professional podcasters (in a nasally voice). You know, we have a...you know, we have two children that will be out in the world soon.
>
> Jazmine: (in an NPR tone)...and if you hear our sound quality it's because we are back in the studio with Black Joy Mixtape. We're still stealing studio time, aren't we?
>
> A: Yes. That means Morgan is back.
> J: Morgan!

(both start laughing)

A: Optimus prime is…

J: Optimus mo!

A: Optimus mo…

J: It's been so long you done forgot his nickname?

A: Man, I'm gone call him by the real shit, cause that's how pleased I am. With this update.

J: Man, I'm so glad to hear my voice sound like velvet again….

A: Yes. Yes!

J: Instead of like in an echo chamber.

A: This bose studio. Yes!

J: Our teams are all boujee now…

A: Yes. Yes…

In the above quote, Amber and Jazmine are excited to not sound like they are "in an echo chamber," which refers to the lower sound quality when they are recording in Amber's living room. This is likely due to lack of professional sound equipment (they have noted that they use one microphone to record the episodes) in addition to recording in an open space that does not lend itself to quality sound acoustics. Although Amber is slightly joking when she refers to them as "professional podcasters," this is a nod to them recording in a studio and to the second podcast that they were preparing to release, which had corporate sponsorship. Professional podcasters, this implies, wouldn't record episodes in a living room, like they were doing before Morgan gave them access to a

recording studio. In discussing having access to a studio, Amber and Jazmine both change the tone of their voices to mimic an NPR-style tone, to show their proximity to "professional podcasting."

In this moment, the hosts are reinforcing the idea that an NPR-tone--which, although they don't explicitly state this, is a monotone sound stripped of cultural relevance and specificity, and mimics a White-sounding voice. They clearly push back against this in many other moments throughout the episodes. But this particular moment of reveling in being in the studio, as opposed to the Black Joy Headquarters, is an interesting one.

As I've stated before, as an avid listener of the show, I enjoy the episodes that are recorded in the Black Joy Headquarters. I enjoy the "echo chamber" sound. I enjoy hearing the background noise. I believe that it adds to the authenticity of the show and really gets at what makes the show special and unique. The two are providing sharp and witty political analysis through the lens of Black feminist thought, without the limits of a television studio or other form of legacy media. The commentary is happening right in Amber's living room. It is accessible. The sound is gritty. It isn't perfect, and it doesn't have to be, precisely because this is not a show modeled after NPR.

The Black Joy Headquarters is an aptly-titled name for Amber's living room, and it stands in for the intimate spaces in which everyday Black folks theorize and speak truth to power. The barbershop, beauty shop and church have stood as significant Black social spaces where political and cultural commentary is developed. But much can be said about the living room and the kitchen. These are gathering spaces where people open up their

homes to build community with one another. People from all walks of life, groups, values, etc. gather at the barbershop, at the beauty shop and to worship at church. But the living room space is a different form of intimacy, due to its size but also due to it being a shared communal space in one's home. People are usually much more selective about who comes into their living space. There is usually an invitation extended, which increases the level of intimacy. In the following quote, the hosts turn the previous notion of the NPR-style atmosphere of the studio on its head

Track #59: I'm Worthy (Featuring Black Femme Brunch)

> Jazmine: This is the first time in this room that an interview has been so loud. (everyone starts laughing)
>
> Amber: Considering where we are. Colonize the space.
>
> Juh/Jos: You should fill the void!
>
> A: People gone come in here on Monday like 'are Black femmes in this bitch?'
>
> Jaz: It smells like shea butter in this bitch.
>
> Juh/Jos: It smells like lavender oils.
>
> A: Lavender
>
> Juh/jos: Tea tree and shit, gotdamn.

The above quote differs from the previous quote--there is less awe of being in the studio and instead an acknowledgement that their presence--four Black feminists--is a shift from the "professional podcasters" that Amber and Jazmine mentioned earlier that would normally be recording in the studio. The monotone, smooth sounding voice of an

NPR host has been replaced, Jazmine notes, with loud laughing, trap music and curse words, courtesy of the Black Joy Mixtape and Black Femme Brunch.

The atmosphere has shifted and is now including Black femmes. Even their scent, the group notes, is different. Shea butter, lavender oil and tea tree oil, they joke. These natural oils, used for a variety of beauty needs, also speaks to the nature of Black femininity (not that caring for oneself is solely relegated to Black femmes). In this moment, the group is harking to specific Black femme beauty tools that have now invaded a space where, they imply, they would not normally be found. But they are taking over, and as Amber notes, "colon[izing] this space." The studio space, in its professional and less intimate sense, has become the Black Joy Headquarters and as such, embodies the sacred nature of a space where Black folks gather to share stories of joy, hope and Black futures.

IMAGINING NEW WORLDS

The Solutions Will Be Communal'

A new world is possible, *The Black Joy Mixtape* argues. The Black feminist vision that Phillips and Walker (and their guests) pursue prioritizes Black libreration. This liberation centers the wellness and humanity of Black folks at all costs. This liberation centers Black women, in particular, and their joy and pleasure. This envisioning of a new world is revolutionary in that it dares to boldly center Black women in all lenses and analysis.

One of the ways that a new world is reimagined is in redefining Black women's relationship with the criminal justice system, and specifically in protection when a rape has occurred. In "#MeTooRemastered"," Walker uses the episode to discuss her abusive relationship with her former partner, Robert Reece. Her comments during the episode are in response to Reece, a sociology professor at The University of Texas at Austin, publicly discussing masculinity and consent without acknowledging that he raped her during their relationship. Walker emotionally shares her story, expressing that she is being "brave," while also not hiding her emotions that she is struggling with discussing what happened to her.

Track 54: #MeTooRemastered

> Jazmine: And unfortunately we live in a society that simply, of the weight, because I didn't go to the police…
>
> Amber: Right.
>
> J: Or the Title IX office, that these are 'unsubstantiated claims'. And also we know that the police are terrorists to our communities. So that's not really an accountability structure that I want to go through.
>
> A: Right.
>
> A: Because doing this is hard enough.
>
> J: Right….And...also like why do we have to wait until there's like a long line of victims. Like why can't it just be me? You know? Like why is it not enough, for him to be a rapist, when I'm telling y'all not only did he rape me, but also there was no kind of way to talk about it...especially because of all the stigma and shame around it. Like we have not reached a point where, when we accuse someone of rape, where people are asking us, well why didn't you go to the police. What does that tell you? There's no systems of accountability outside of the criminal justice system and even then the way the criminal justice system is

set up, it's not in a way that centers the victim at all. Because really, they're trying to prove that you are a liar.

A: Right.

J: And the reason why I can talk in the affirmative about Robert Reece is because he does not deny that he has done this to me. But he definitely is trying to skate around the gravity and level of harm that he is currently inflicting on people. And that's not okay. That's not okay….And definitely, we can't...if we can't 'substantiate' these claims because I would never compromise the safety of these Black women, because I know that MeToo is a very privileged thing to participate in. There aren't a whole lot of protections for us and especially for Black women who are seen as sexual deviants within our societies and in our communities. Like...there aren't a whole lot of incentives to come forward…..and (with emphasis and short pause)...All of us will not be so lucky to get away. We gotta do something. We gotta say something.

J: I literally have been doing the best I can….(long pause)...I'm showing up as my best right now. (beginning to cry) And I wish I had more answers and more solutions...but what I also know that...solutions won't come from folks like Robert Reece.
1
A: I'm sorry Jazmine.

JW: The solutions will be deeply communal. And we won't keep putting the responsibility solely on the individuals with the courage, the privilege, and relative protection to come forward.

A: The only way to address sexual assault can't be through bodies….and experiences.

In this particular exchange, Walker places her own rape within a larger context, pulling in the #MeToo movement and expanding it to include an intersectional lens. In reimagining a new world, Walker is adamant that the current way of handling sexual assault, involving the traditional criminal justice system, is not suitable for redressing the harm done to Black women and other marginalized folks. The criminal justice system, Walker acknowledges, does not prioritize the care and perseverance of Black women, and

the complicated history of Black women feeling allegiance to their race and choosing silence over reporting abuse at the hands of Black men.

"The solutions will be communal," Walker insists. In imagining a new world that centers a Black feminist vision of liberation, sexual assault victims not only have space made for their healing and for justiice to be served, but the rapist is held accountable and responsible for their own healing. In Jazmine and Amber's Black feminist vision of liberation, Black women are listened to and believed, without fear of repercussions and without having to be as bold and vulnerable as Walker is doing in this episode in order for justice to be served.

The definition of communal is as follows: "shared by all members of a community." This intentional focus on community as opposed to individualistic healing also harkens to a sharp turn from patriarchal, Eurocentric notions that encourage individuality in the face of community. This individualistic mindset is a key feature of patriarchal ideals. It is a colonized mindset. What Jazmine and Amber are alluding to instead ia a turn towards a decolonized, Afrocentric view of community in which we are all responsible for each other's healing. Moving away from a Eurocentric, colonized mindset also shifts the thinking of accountability, of justice and focuses more on healing.

So what would that look like in action? Amber states, "The only way to address sexual assault can't be through bodies...and experiences." The accountability, this implies, should not solely rely on the testimony of the victim. In relying on the testimony of the victim, as Jazmine discusses, the intent is to prove that the testimony is somehow

false and that the victim is lying. In a society where Black women are not listened to and are not heard, this "solution" already puts us at a disadvantage.

Jazmine sharing her testimony, not through the traditional criminal justice system, but through her podcast platform, shift this narrative. Amber is listening to her and believing her, and so are the listeners of the podcast. She has a stage, and we are her audience. She has amplified her own voice. She has made the solution a communal one. We as listeners are part of her community and part of her healing. In speaking truth to power as a Black feminist, Jazmine calls attention to uneven systems of power that harm the most marginalized.

> J: And if this is what you're willing to do to a person who is upwardly mobile…
>
> A: Man.
>
> J: With the ability to talk. The person who...like while I was in this relationship, I was full on going through comps, training, all that stuff. The thing that I keep thinking about is, what is happening to these women that are like Cardi B?
>
> A: Right.
>
> J: Like when Cardi...not even talking about sex workers…
>
> A: Definitely.
>
> J: Definitely need to talk about Me Too in regards to Black sex workers. We also have to keep talking about Me Too in relation to Black women who aren't as mobile. Who…
>
> A: People who work at restaurants. People who are domestic workers or being sexually assaulted. Who the fuck do you think they're able to tell, if Jazmine just said, this shit has to be deeply communal because there's no justice system for it.
>
> J: And we just have to keep reaching back.
>
> A: Man.

> J: Keep reaching back into more of these stories and also just believe people. Like because again...it's very prevalent. We have to believe people, because there really are a whole lot of incentives to be out here like this y'all, forreal...and it's just not right now. And so there has to be more systems to support the woman at Rite Aid, who is letting you know that she was abused by her manager.

In reimagining a new world through a Black feminist lens, Jazmine and Amber center Black women and continue to address the uneven dynamics of power systems. Jazmine acknowledges her degree of privilege---an activist with a podcast--and uses that privilege to amplify other victims of lesser privilege. A communal vision acknowledges the uneven systems of power, and "reaches back" to make sure that the most marginalized are also spoken of. We cannot discuss solutions if they do not include everyone, Jazmine argues. A reimagining of a new world that uses a Black feminist lens lifts up everyone in the pursuit of liberation, which is why it is imperative to hear from this perspective. In sharing her story of assault and centering her perspective as a survivor, Jazmine offers a lens to hear from an actual survivor and to offer solutions that would bring justice and healing to those who need it most.

CHICKEN WINGS, EARRINGS AND ABORTION STORYTELLING

In continuing to imagine new worlds, Jazmine and Amber bring their friend Micha'le into the Black Joy Headquarters to discuss her abortion over chicken wings and fries. Micha'le initially comes to Amber's apartment to retrieve a pair of earrings, and in the midst of talking to the duo, casually begins discussing her abortion. They all agree that the conversation should be recorded as an episode of the podcast.

> A: Even the fact that like Micha'le is on the mic because we are just like sitting here eating chicken wings. Sharing stories. What were we saying? We were just

> talking about planned parenthood in general. But we were just randomly talking and Micha'le was like, "Oh yeah, when I was at planned parenthood to have an abortion.." and we're like "tell us more, would you like to share it?"
>
> J: And she was so gracious to share it with us and has agreed to share it with you all. But what is most interesting or striking, and y'all hear this about like...it's abortion storytelling in a way that you would never just put it together.
>
> A: Yeah. And we have a lot of amazing friends who actually...that's their advocacy work, is telling their abortion stories. Like our phenomenal friend Renee Bracy Sherman shares her abortion story, but also theres something to be said about black women sharing abortion stories over chicken wings and rice.

The podcast is used as a platform to present an abortion storytelling in a way that is rarely heard. Abortion storytelling is an act of resistance in that it refuses the stigma of shame attached to the act of having an abortion. But what also makes this conversation unique is the intentionality in the mundane activity. Micha'le is at Amber's apartment not to be a guest on the podcast, but to eat food with her friends and pick up a pair of earrings. It is important to acknowledge the duality in this act: a typical conversation does not normally turn into a recorded podcast episode. But this podcast episode is also structured to replicate a conversation between friends, which normalizes the sharing of an abortion experience. This podcast seeks to reimagine abortion storytelling as a highly political but also normalized (safe) activity that makes room for the everyday women to share their stories.

In reimagining the way we share stories of abortions, a new form of medical care for those seeking an abortion is offered. While describing the abortion experience, Micha'le details how she became emotional when she discovered that not only did she not get to choose her abortion provider, but that the doctor performing it would not be a

woman, as she desired. In response, Amber and Jazmine visualize what a caring abortion experience could look like.

> Amber: Yeah, we affirm whatever decision you make. You deserve that. And I love that we're talking about...you talked about all the barriers around the wait laws and all these um..different pieces around getting an abortion when really what you're saying is that what you needed was more options for how that abortion was performed. What actually look like justice. To be...I think...I mean if I were ever to open up an abortion clinic it seems like you should be able to go in there and get a mani pedi, have a massage chair while you're waiting like….just...The same way we love on mothers who are giving birth, or should, seems to be how we should treat women who are choosing to get an abortion. That this is still a process that your body goes through and that you deserve some fucking respect. Like..
>
> Jazmine: ...You know, Because in some ways I just wonder like...I just kinda feel like some of our listeners….like...this is new. This is a new experience. And we're talking about going to get an abortion, being like a spa. I imagine that hit some of y'all as a 'No, it shouldn't!' But the thing is, think about how we receive medical care generally as Black people. Period. The history of medical care, no matter what, in this country has been fucked up.
>
> A: Awful.
>
> J: Literally Black women have gone in for routine check-ups and leave without not a single reproductive organ in their body damn near.
>
> A: Mmmhmm.
>
> J: So...Being forced sterilized. Right. So reparations in some ways will look like our Medical Care...the experience just being totally different.
>
> A: We spend so much time defending our right to this medical care that we never actually sit down and have a conversation about how we can make it better. I can't go and say 'yo, it would be nice if there were these things in your facilities' or I had a option between a male and a female doctor for my abortion, because if I say that the anti's will grab a hold of that and say no, you are anti-planned parenthood and planned parenthood is an awful place and it should be shut down. That's not what I'm saying.
>
> J: No.

> A: I'm saying I would like to still have access to this health care and I want it to be better because I deserve better. Period.
>
> J: I mean why settle for the moon? If y'all would just let a nigga thrive and be as brilliant as I can possibly be, ain't no telling where we could go in this universe. So we….In order for us to get through or get to the next level of innovating our healthcare we have to do this ridiculous work of proving that we should have something that's already legal.

The abortion storytelling moves from the mundane act of having a conversation with friends to, as described earlier, offering communal solutions. It moves from being an individualized experience, to thinking through how Micha'le's individual experience is indicative of the ways that abortions continue to be stigmatized and provide demoralizing experiences for those who choose to have them. Her experience is then used to imagine a different one, intertwined with the care that, as Amber says, all birthing people should be experiencing as they prepare to give birth.

An abortion clinic with spa-like services may seem jarring initially. This is the complete opposite of how Micha'le describes her abortion experience: protestors outside, crying and weeping people around her. But in reimagining new systems that are communal, the well-being of people are considered. A communal abortion experience, dreamed up by Amber and Jazmine, aims to produce as little harm as possible and instead recognizes the humanity of the person receiving the service. Reimagining a new world through the lens of Black feminism and Black joy does away with Eurocentric standards of harm and actions that celebrate individualism at the expense of the collective and instead embraces a spirit of community and care for the people who make up that community.

In this reimagined new world, abortions are not highly contested acts. Instead, they are medical services, and as such, receive the same level of attention, care and bedside manner as any other routine/medical service or procedure. Micha'le's abortion experience would have included a (caring) support person able to hold her hand during the procedure, and the ability to choose her own abortion provider. In reality, there are certain states where there are only a handful of abortion proviers, which would make choosing one very difficult due to the sheer lack of options. In reality, abortion is still a highly contested although legal act, and the barriers put in place for those who choose to terminate their pregnancy are intentional and designed to perpetuate the abortion as shame stigma. This shows why this reimagining of so many facets of abortion--from the mundane activity of storytelling to a caring vision of the actual procedure--is so crucial. Amber and Jazmine's vision may not exist right now, but they have provided the groundwork to at least question the uneven systems of power that make their vision seem farfetched. In questioning this uneven system, they stand in the tradition of Black feminist thought, of speaking from "the last place they thought of."

A New Imagining of Femme

> Jos: So I had a friend, Sean Wade, who um..we worked at a bike shop together cause niggas just trynna make it. And he was like ugh..whenever I got to Black..ugh gay spaces, because he's a guy so he knows all the Black gay spaces and he wouldn't feel like he fit in cause he's a feminine person. And so he would feel like 'okay i'm here' and at the same time 'people are not approaching me in a way that makes me feel good blah blah blah'. And I was like what if um..we did an event..where you could be among people who made you feel good? So we decided we were gonna have Blakc Femme Brunch. We're just gonna have a brunch and invite people over, and just be a bunch of Black femme niggas choppin it up and fuckin up some chicken and waffles. Well the first time we did

> it, it was like 12 disciples. So it was like 12 people came and we twerked down, we had fun, we exchanged numbers, some of the people that I met that day I'm still friends with now. So it's just like um..the whole idea of centering Black femmes and making sure that Black femmes are the most important part and the opening up the definition of Black femme to be like anything that you makes you feel feminine energy. It doesn't necessarily mean that you have to wear a flowy dress, if you are a stud nigga with a straight up mustache, a handlebar mustache...
>
> Amber: Got your strap.
>
> Jos: Your strap is on and you have a floral fuckin' ugh button up on. If that feels femme to you then your femme. I mean you don't have...it doesn't have to be some strict thing. I think that's white people shit, where we have to like conform or like be a certain way. Or we have to meet every expectation to fit in the puzzle and some niggas like me, we don't fit in a puzzle. We are our own art piece, our own masterpiece. So that's why Black femme..

In discussing the creation of the Black Femme Brunch with its creators Jos and Juh Nay, Amber and Jazmine help foster a space to reimagine gender and gender expression for Black feminine identified and presenting folks. The episode initially highlights the local event, held in Washington, D.C. But it dovetails quickly into a discussion of gender expression and pleasure, and how the creators identified the need for a space that centered Black queer femininity and created what they wanted to see. This episode personifies a Black feminist-created space of imagining a new world. In the above quote from the episode, Jos describes how the Black Femme Brunch space strives to move away from restricting labels rooted in Eurocentric ideals of gender, and instead embraces a more fluid understanding of gender. To quote Jos, "Some niggas like me, we don't fit in a puzzle."

The episode could have been a surface-level interview with the creators, or a shameless commercial advertising the events and giving a brief backstory of the events

that led to its creation. To be clear, there is nothing wrong with this kind of episode. It benefits both parties--the brunch would be introduced to a new audience who may not have heard of it before, and in turn, fans of the brunch would be introduced to the podcast and are potential new loyal listeners.

A New Imagining

In her classic text *When Chickenheads Come Home To Roost*, Joan Morgan wrote about needing a feminism "brave enough to fuck with the greys." This kind of feminism, she argued, was one not steeped in stiff academic jargon or one that centered White women. A feminism brave enough to fuck with the greys was complicated, nuanced and acknowledged the layered identities that people have. The feminism that Amber and Jazmine embodied in *The Black Joy Mixtape*, I believe, was brave, honest and complicated enough to fuck with the greys. *The Black Joy Mixtape* was a Black feminist podcast not just in name, but in action, as well. The departure of the show from the podcast landscape has left a true hole for all who were fans, including me.

In this chapter, there was discussion of trauma and pain. This does not stand in opposition to joy, but rather amplifies a vision of community and liberation. The episodes analyzed in this chapter focused on healing by imagining a world where trauma and pain exist within joy. At the end of each episode, the hosts would ask each other (or the guests, if there were any) about their hopes for Black futures. My hope for the future of Black feminist podcasts are that they continue to be produced and made, first and foremost, with abundant resources. My hope for Black feminist podcasts is also that they can

provide a model of how to embody one's full identity—how to not edit cultural references or sounds and how to have intimate, in-depth conversations. Studying Black feminist podcasts can provide a model for studying other niche podcasts. In Black feminist podcasts we are presented rich text to think through feminist sounds and feminist media.

Chapter 4: 'Couldn't Be Me Girl:' Black Podcasts Reckon With A Legend

HOMETOWN HERO

As a Chicagoan, I have a unique relationship with singer Robert Kelly, known to the world as R. Kelly. His popularity in Chicago, our shared hometown, is unmatched. Growing up, R. Kelly's presence was large and everywhere. His music was played constantly on our local Black radio stations. It wasn't Christmas until the stations played his two Christmas songs. R. Kelly is undeniably a Chicago legend--he was still very present in the city throughout his career, even having a mansion in the Chicagoland suburbs, which added to his hometown likability. His career spans over the course of several decades, as both a singer and a prolific songwriter. Throughout his career, there have always been allegations of sexual abuse. There have also been allegations that he had illegal relationships with underage girls.

R. Kelly's rise to fame began in the early 1990s as a successful singer-songwriter and music producer. He was the lead songwriter and producer of singer Aaliyah's first album *Age Ain't Nothin' But A Number* (1994). Kelly and Aaliyah would secretly (and illegally) marry--he was 27 years old and she was 15 years old. Over the years, his career would be plagued by various allegations (and out-of-court settlements) of abuse and inappropriate sexual behavior. In 1996, he was sued by Tiffany Hawkins[13], who alleges

[13] Hawkins appeared in the second installment of the Lifetime docuseries *Surviving R. Kelly* (2020), that brought even more of R. Kelly's decades-long abuse allegations back into the mainstream media spotlight.

that they had a sexual relationship when she was 15 years old and he was 24 years old. Hawkins sued him for "personal injuries and distress."

Footage of Kelly allegedly raping a 13 year old girl was anonymously sent to the *Chicago Sun-Times* in 2002. Kelly faced child pornography charges and insisted that it was not him on the tape. In the footage, Kelly can be seen urinating on the girl. This was later the subject of episodes of comedy series *The Boondocks* and *Chappelle's Show*. Both episodes showed how media treated the incident--the urination became the focus instead of the statutory rape that was recorded. The trial would last for six years--an intentional move on Kelly's team as the girl grew older, which would make it difficult for her to be seen as a child by the jurors. In 2008, Kelly was acquitted of the charges.

I can remember when the news first broke about the rape tape--podcast host Queen of *Tea with Queen & J* insists that it be called the rape tape to highlight that the acts performed were not between two consenting adults. I was still in middle school, and the adults around me made it clear that they did not believe that R. Kelly committed these crimes and were indifferent about the "fast" girl that was also in the tape. "Fast" in this context is a term often used to describe the perceived hypersexuality of young Black girls. During the long, drawn-out trial, Chicagoans were conflicted about offering support to their hometown hero--could he have done this? If he did do it, did we care?

I remember hearing the news that he was acquitted on the radio, and my stomach dropped. For the rest of the weekend, a celebration emerged. The gray cloud was lifted, and his music played nonstop. As a teenager, I couldn't fully voice how this made me feel. I just knew that I felt extremely uncomfortable listening to adults repeatedly call the

girl in the video "fast" and place blame on her, reserving sympathy and compassion instead for the adult who raped her. After he was acquitted, R. Kelly was welcomed back into the Chicago (and national) spotlight with open arms--it could be argued that he never actually left the spotlight during this time, as the *Surviving R.Kelly* (2019) docuseries reiterates that he made some of the biggest hits of his career during the trial. His music continued to be played, he was still helmed as a genius and stories about his "recruiting" visits to local high schools and the Rock and Roll McDonald's in downtown Chicago to find young girls continued to float around the city as if they were stories about simple gossip.

In 2017, reporter Jim DeRogatis, who had been reporting on Kelly's abusive ways for years, wrote a bombshell article accusing Kelly of having a sex cult of young (but not underage) girls. DeRogatis detailed that Kelly "control[led] every aspect of their lives: dictating what they eat, how they dress, when they bathe, when they sleep, and how they engage in sexual encounters that he records."[14] The six women lived in homes in Atlanta and Chicago, and had little to no contact with their families, who were desperately trying to reconnect with them. That same year, Kenyette Barnes and Oronike Odeleye began the #MuteRKelly movement, encouraging the media industry to sever ties with Kelly due to decades of abusive behavior. Odeleye said the following to *NPR* about the goals of the movement:

> We're calling for a complete and total mute. We don't want to hear him on the radio. We do not want him on streaming services. We do not want him booked at

[14] https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jimderogatis/parents-told-police-r-kelly-is-keeping-women-in-a-cult

> concerts. We want the collective society to erase him from our consciousness. So that he can no longer be insulated from the consequences of his crime. It's his money, it's his wealth, it's his notoriety, it's all the connections that he has in the entertainment industry that make it hard for victims to successfully prosecute him. And if we're able to take away the funding source for all of that, then we're able to expose him and hopefully get a conviction against him for the things that he's been doing for the past 25 years.

The movement gained steam along with the rise of the Time's Up and #MeToo, movements aimed at eradicating sexual abuse in Hollywood.

Surviving R. Kelly is a six-part docuseries that aired over the course of three nights in January 2019 on *Lifetime*. The series detailed the decades of sexual abuse allegations against Kelly, with appearances from dozens of people in Kelly's circles and interviews with multiple accusers. The documentary would detail, in graphic description from the survivors themselves, the abuse at the hands of Kelly, and the tangled web of support that he would benefit from that shielded him and allowed him to continue to terrorize so many women and girls. The premiere of *Surviving* was a major blow to the dismissal of Kelly's sexual abuse. A few days after the docuseries ended, more allegations of sexual abuse would surface. Celebrities such as Lady Gaga, Chance The Rapper and Celine Dion began distancing themselves from the music they'd created with Kelly. His label would eventually drop him. In February 2019, Kelly was officially charged with ten counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse. At the time of this writing in June 2021, Kelly is currently in jail awaiting four trials in federal and state courts in three states on multiple sex-crime charges.[15] *Surviving* part two aired in 2020 and

[15] https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/celebrities/2020/09/08/r-kelly-loses-latest-bid-exit-jail-new-hearing-cite-attack/5750126002/

provided updates and more interviews with survivors, including Hawkins, who was the first person to sue him because of alleged abuse.

One of the theses of the docuseries was a culture reckoning with how it allowed an abuser to prosper and thrive for decades. He didn't do this alone, the docuseries insisted over and over through interviews with Kelly's employees, loved ones and experts commenting on the cycle of abuse. We as a culture, the docuseries implied, allowed this to happen. More blatantly, we allowed it to happen because the victims were primarily Black women and girls.

With that in mind, this chapter explores the response of several podcasts to the *Surviving R.Kelly* docuseries (2019). Although the documentary would eventually air a follow-up series in 2020, this chapter will primarily focus on the 2019 series. *Surviving* (2019) released explosive testimonies from the survivors themselves and people in Kelly's camp who willingly assisted him for decades in holding up these abusive patterns towards mostly Black women and underage girls. The documentary was executive produced by veteran music journalist dream hampton, who has had an extensive career writing about Black music and culture as it has grown over the years.

Each of the podcasts that I center in this chapter released episodes very soon after the docuseries aired. This was important, as a key point of my analysis will be how they are processing the docuseries and the initial aftermath as it is unfolding. These are Black podcasts that center Blackness and take a decided approach into doing this. They are not reporting on the docuseries from the sidelines--they are experiencing it as Black people who are participating in a reckoning of Black media and culture's complicity in the Kelly

scandal. Like the docuseries, this reckoning is happening both outside of the crucial years (before and during the child pornography charges), and as the #MuteRKelly movement gains momentum. But these podcasts should also be included in a reckoning of how Black media and culture responded to the avalanche of evidence that would eventually lead to Kelly's multiple charges and subsequent arrest. What can these podcasts provide in this current context? How can this analysis move us forward in critically studying podcasts as media format and as Black media?

As stated in both the documentary and the podcasts in this chapter, Kelly was able to "hide in plain sight" while committing his crimes due to the race of his victims. Many people stated that if his victims were White women or girls, more attention would have been paid and he would have been brought to justice. But because they were Black women and girls, there was little to no care for what was happening to them.

The "reckoning" that the documentary focuses on is replicated within the podcasts. Black media are taking a look within to examine the impact of Kelly on Black culture, but this conversation cannot be had without also reckoning with how the media participated in elevating him to the status that he has, and how media can be a tool to participate in his downfall, which is ultimately what happened. But what does this reckoning mean? What does it look like? What does accountability look like in the age of #MeToo? Although podcasts are relatively new, the hosts are forced to reckon with their complicity on a platform that, if used correctly, can take this chance to do things differently, to learn from the critiques that they offer for the documentary and its participants. This reckoning is similar to the ever-popular "cancel culture" that permeates

today's digital world—although scholar Meredith Clark argues that there is a long history of canceling folks at the hands of marginalized groups that predates social media, such as boycotting. Clark defines canceling as "an expression of agency, a choice to withdraw one's attention from someone of something whose values, (in)action, or speech are so offensive, one no longer wishes to grace them with their presence, time and money" (Clark, 88).

The reckoning did not stop within the docuseries. Different media outlets began reckoning with the central questions of the docuseries, as well. Pointedly, several Black podcasts grappled with the weight of the series. What did it mean for Black media to reckon with one of its darlings, one of its seemingly untouchables? Podcasts are a form of Black media, but most were not in existence during this decades-long battle with Kelly. How does a new medium reckon with the responses of an older and more established medium? What lessons can be gleaned from this kind of reflection?

This chapter will explore how each podcast reckons with community responsibility and accountability, and Black media's reckoning with its role in the continued abuse at the hands of R. Kelly. In many ways, the *Surviving R. Kelly* docuseries (and podcast responses) highlight how the Kelly scandal brings an intersectional lens to the #MeToo movement, as it situates race, gender and class along the context of sexual violence. "How did we let this happen?" the docuseries and podcasts all struggle to answer this question, with varying levels of accountability and remorse. What's certain is that Kelly was able to get away with abusing his victims, while remaining an "icon" in Black music and media, because of the lack of concern for

Black girls and women. The podcast format allows its hosts to have in-depth conversations with various Black hosts and perspectives that situate this disregard for Black girls and women in unique ways that deserve a closer analysis.

Podcast name and episode title	[16]Podcast description	Episode description	Participants
Tea with Queen & J (2014-) "Couldn't Be Me Girl" (January 8, 2019)	Two womanist race nerds talking liberation, politics & pop culture over tea. Dismantling White supremacist patriarchal capitalism one episode at a time.	Queen & J. are two womanist race nerds talking liberation, politics, and pop-culture over tea. Drink up! On this episode… We're shedding old friendships, setting new affirmations and all kinds of fun shit before an in depth convo about #SurvivingRKelly in real life, the docuseries, why it might not go far enough, and who shouldn't have been included. Trigger Warning: #SurvivingRKelly conversation including discussions of rape, grooming, assault & other abuses starts at moment 48:36 and ends at 2:02:10 This week's hot list: Witches & sorcery & Black girl magic, ending patriarchal friendships with pizazz, processing #SurvivingRKelly and reliving old sh!t, being respectable won't save you, the fast girl myth, complicit adults, communal accountability, sex tape vs. rape tape (words mean things), celebrity victim blamers (why was Charlechew even in that doc?), and then light and fun sh!t, we promise!	Queen; J
Marsha's Plate (2017-); "Surviving You, Them, and Ourselves #MarshasPlate" (January 10, 2019)	A Black trans Podcast. #MarshasPlate is a lively podcast where three friends come together every Thursday to share opinions and perspectives that centers the black perspective. Hosted By Diamond Stylz, Mia Mix, and Zee. All Houston-based digital strategists, black feminists, civil right advocates, and black trans people. We explore topics of gender, current events, politics, and scumbags all around the world upholding systems of oppression from a black trans feminist lens. With our funny no-holds-barred style we introduce you to new perspectives, stories that connect you to transness, and trans community leaders around the country	On Today's Menu on Marsha's Plate Diamond talks about Surviving R. Kelly and take aways from the docu-series from Dream Hampton; Mia talks about The Government shutdown and some its effects; Zee talks about some audience feed back from last episode and feelings of not being so open on the show	Diamond Stylz; Zee; Mia Mix
The Clubhouse with Mouse Jones; Deconstructing R. Kelly with Jamilah Lemieux & Toure (January 10, 2019)	Mouse Jones, alongside Reek, comprise The Clubhouse Podcast. Discussing everything from Hip Hop, relationships, women, and whatever else they probably shouldn't. Tune in every week, never know who's going to be dropping by the clubhouse.	On this very special episode Mouse sits down with writer Jamilah Lemieux and journalist Touré to discuss the recent R. Kelly documentary and the aftermath that has ensued from the series.	Mouse Jones; Jamilah Lemieux; Toure
The Clubhouse with Mouse Jones; "Dani" (January 11, 2019)	Mouse Jones, alongside Reek, comprise The Clubhouse Podcast. Discussing everything from Hip Hop, relationships, women, and whatever else they probably shouldn't. Tune in every week, never know who's going to be dropping by the clubhouse.	On Wednesday we released an episode with Touré and Jamilah Lemieux who were featured on the Surviving R. Kelly documentary. After the episode published, Dani Castro who works as a makeup artist commented on Mouse's IG post that Touré had sexually harassed her while both worked at Time Inc. in 2017. At the time of the recording we were not aware of the accusations against Touré so we invited Dani to share her story because we felt this was the right thing to do.	Mouse Jones; Dani Makeup

Table 3: Detailed descriptions of the podcasts and episodes analyzed in this chapter.

[16] The podcast and episode descriptions each came from the show's website or Apple Podcasts page.

PODCASTS

The three podcasts that I will examine are all hosted by Black people with various intersecting identities. Each podcast episode was chosen because it analyzes the *Surviving* docuseries and did so relatively soon after the docuseries was released. This was a key aspect to selecting the podcasts, because their analysis and perspectives were fresh takes following the docuseries release, which helps to provide the temperature of how different sectors in Black culture were reacting to the series.

Marsha's Plate is an independent, Houston-based podcast hosted by three Black trans activists--Diamond Stylz, Mia Mix and Zee. The podcast, which began in 2016 in response to the numerous attacks on trans folks during the presidential election, focuses on Black trans experiences, particularly "our murders, unemployment, housing, police brutality, misogynoir[17], economics and so much more that affects our livelihood[18]." In the segment of the episode that I will be analyzing "Surviving You, Them and Ourselves" (January 10, 2019), Diamond Stylz takes the lead in connecting Kelly's abusive and predatory ways to similar tactics enacted on vulnerable, Black LGBTQ youth by older Black folks. Stylz insists that in the same way the abuse was ignored due to the identity of Kelly's victims as mostly Black women and girls with vulnerable identities, a similar thing happens with these LGBTQ youth whose abuse is ignored because they are queer.

[17] Misogynoir is a term coined by Dr. Moya Bailey to describe the particular instances of oppression that Black women and girls experience.
[18] https://diamondstylz.com/marshas-plate/

Tea with Queen and J is an independent, New York-based podcast hosted by Queen and J, who self-identify as "womanist[19] race nerds". The show, created in 2014, is about "liberation, politics, pop culture and social justice[20]." In the segment of the episode that I will be analyzing-- "Couldn't Be Me Girl" (January 8, 2019)--the hosts give a review of the docuseries.[21] Both hosts identify as survivors of sexual abuse, and this perspective adds a rich layer of understanding and connection to their own analysis of the series.

Lastly, I am analyzing two episodes of *The Clubhouse with Mouse Jones*, a now-defunct podcast that was part of the Loud Speakers Network. Hosted by entertainer Mouse Jones, the New York-based podcast discussed "everything from hip hop, relationships, women and whatever else [he] probably shouldn't[22]." When the docuseries premiered, Jones did a three-part series arc around the show.[23] The first episode, "Deconstructing R.Kelly" is an interview with journalists Jamilah Lemieux and Toure, who were both featured in the docuseries. Next, he interviewed a lawyer who provided a legal perspective on how Kelly's alleged crimes impacted Black communities and gave insight on the likelihood of the criminal justice system being involved again. Lastly, after

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[19] Writer Alice Walker offered the following definition of womanism: "a Black feminist or feminist of color; womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." In other words, womanism highlights the exclusion felt by many Black women in the traditional White feminist movement.

[20] http://www.teawithqueenandj.com/meet-queen-and-j

[21] It is important to note that of the three podcasts, they are the only one to give a comprehensive review.

[22] https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-clubhouse-with-mouse-jones/id1001894354

[23] I intended to analyze all three episodes but was not able to retrieve the third episode, as the podcast is now defunct. The episodes that I am including were available on YouTube. Only one episode of the podcast is available on Apple Music and Spotify--none of the R.Kelly episodes are available on those platforms.

the first episode aired with Toure, a woman named Dani Makeup reached out to Jones to let him know that she had been repeatedly sexually harassed by Toure while doing his makeup on a show. Jones interviewed her and allowed her to share her story, which included reporting the harassment to their employer (Time, Inc.) and his subsequent termination. Together, these two episodes provide a layered landscape for analysis--the journalists provide insight into the making of the series and look back at how Kelly was covered in the media. The interview with Dani Makeup provides a real-time look into how a podcaster covered sexual harassment in the #MeToo and #MuteRKelly eras. These three podcasts give various snapshots of how different Black communities were responding to a reckoning of power, abuse and exploitation within Black culture and media.

NOT WORTHY OF PROTECTION

The dismissal/silence of the violence happening to the Black women and girls that Kelly abused has a long legacy. Black women and girls have a horrifying history with sexual violence. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins says the following about sexual violence enacted upon Black women, worth quoting in its entirety:

> Rape and other acts of overt violence that Black women have experienced, such as physical assault during slavery, domestic abuse, incest, and sexual extortion, accompany Black women's subordination in a system of race, class, and gender oppression...Violence against Black women tends to be legitimated and therefore condoned while the same acts visited on other groups may remain nonlegitimated and nonexcusable. Certain forms of violence may garner the backing and control of the state while others remain uncontrolled. Specific acts of sexual violence

> visited on African-American women reflect a broader process by which violence is socially constructed in a race-and gender-specific manner (Collins, 177).[24]

The above excerpt echoes what many of the podcast hosts stated, that the race of Kelly's victims played a large role in Kelly's ability to conduct his crimes. In short, very little attention was paid to these Black women and girls specifically because of their race. This is symbolic of a larger pattern of abuse enacted upon Black women and girls. Due to their status as property while enslaved, Black women were not viewed as victims worthy of protection. We can see that this still lingers. The sexual violence enacted upon them while enslaved was also justified by their supposed hypersexual nature. Black women were not recognized as a legally protected class, which again, has carried over into modern times. This treatment stood in stark contrast to White womanhood, which was held up as pious, virtuous and worthy of protection, and created a hierarchy of "true" womanhood[25] that Black women did not have access to. Collins (1991) wrote:

> Given that both Black and white women were important to slavery's continuation, the prevailing ideology functioned to mask contradictions in social relations affecting all women. According to the cult of true womanhood, "true" women possessed four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Elite white women and those of the emerging middle class were encouraged to aspire to these virtues (p. 71).

The protection of White womanhood was also used as a justification of violence against Black men, who were routinely labeled as violent rapists (even if there was no evidence to be found). "Depicting African-American men as sexually charged beasts who

[24] Collins, P.H., (1991). *Black feminist thought.* Routledge.

[25] "True" womanhood is a concept that is also difficult for non-Black and many White women to access, as well.

desired white women created the myth of the Black rapist. Lynching emerged as the specific form of sexual violence visited on Black men, with the myth of the Black rapist as its ideological justification" (Collins, p. 177) Black men and women experienced sexual violence in different ways with devastating consequences to both. Again, the effect of this violence still lingers. Afraid to report crimes of sexual violence against them because of this history of violence towards Black men, many Black women suffer in silence "in defense of an elusive Black unity" (Collins, p. 179). Black men being falsely accused of sexual abuse by White women has a horrifying history, and Mouse Jones alludes to this in his interview with Dani Makeup, the White woman who was sexually harassed by journalist Toure while she did his makeup.

It is important to note that Black girls also do not have access to the protection given to "true" womanhood. Black girls are hypersexualized in a way that is specific to their age. In a Twitter thread[26], writer Mikki Kendall addresses the "fast-tailed girl" trope as: "The myth of #FastTailedGirls is one that allows victims to be blamed & abusers to get a free pass if they target "bad" girls." The fast-tailed girl is promiscuous, usually from an early age, and as Kendall states, is blamed for "attracting" older men. I can remember the victim from the footage in Kelly's case being called a "fast-tailed girl" by many people. It removes any wrongdoing from the abuser and places the blame on the victim. The inability to see Black girls as children was used to the benefit of Kelly's legal team during his first trial, as the trial stretched out for years in the hopes that as the girl aged

[26] https://www.gradientlair.com/post/68646097154/fast-tailed-girls-stereotyped-abused-black-girls

into an adult, jurors would have a harder time seeing her as a child. One of the jurors affirmed that this strategy was successful when he later revealed on the docuseries that he found it difficult to see the young girl on the tape as a child. Though he doesn't explicitly say that it was due to her race and gender, it was very much implied.

Black Media

Media has served as an important political and cultural space for Black people. "When marginalized groups are excluded from public debate and political power, their individual and collective struggle for power on a personal level serve as resistance to a larger superstructure[27]" (Steele, 114). Black media, along with other cultural institutions have been key spaces for Black people to express ideas and center themselves when they are excluded from mainstream spaces. Scholar Catherine Squires (2002) writes: "It is within these institutions that conversations about Black publicity, rights and interests take place and are transformed into strategies to counter the oppression of White supremacist rule" (p. 451)[28]. Black media plays a critical role in providing thought around cultural happenings that are specific to the needs and interests of those invested in Black communities. In the next sections, I discuss the Black feminist themes that permeate throughout the episodes as the podcast hosts seek to reckon with a troubled icon.

[27] Steele, C.K. (2018). Black bloggers and their varied publics: The everyday politics of Black discourse online. *Television & New Media*, *19*(2), 112-127.
[28] Squires, C. (2002). Rethinking the black public sphere: An alternative vocabulary for multiple public spheres. *Communication Theory, 12*(4), 446-468.

‘I’m Already Feeling Things’: Trigger Warnings As Ethic of Care

Tea with Queen and J

J: So this week, uh, a lot has happened. You want to give the trigger warning or should I?

Queen: Trigger warning for R.Kelly.

J: R. Kelly is the trigger warning. That should be enough. You should like, know what that means and where we're going and all that stuff. But in case you don't know, R Kelly is an R & B singer-songwriter, producer, terrorist.

Queen : And that is his guise. He's not actually that. That's his guise.

J: He's pretending to be a singer-songwriter so that he can terrorize the Black community specifically targeting Black women and girls. And um, so this conversation is going to be about rape. It's going to be about statutory rape. It’s going to be about grooming. We’re going to touch on physical abuse, mental abuse, emotional abuse, sex trafficking.

J: If you did not watch it, you can still listen to this because I mean, history is history and R.Kelly been a rapist. So you're not, we're not, there's no spoilers here. Yeah. This is just like what it is. You could still listen to this. And if you're someone who was going to watch the documentary anyway, you can still like fucking watch it. We're just giving our insight. And um, yeah, you shouldn't be watching this. Like I don't want it to be spoiled. This is not that type of entertainment.
Queen: Like I'm already feeling things.

J: I know. I'm sorry. Sorry, sorry to everybody else who is feeling things. We love you and we’re going to feel it. We’re going to feel it together. And if this episode is not the one for you, if you can’t do this with us, turn it off. You don’t have to listen to this if this is not your jam. You don’t have to relive this...We love you. And we’ll see you next episode, if you’re not fucking with this.

Queen: But I’ll put it in the show notes. The timestamps. You can know how to skip all of this and get to the happy place.

Before Queen and J begin the segment about the docuseries, they take care to offer a trigger warning to listeners. They acknowledge that witnessing these hosts talk at

length about abuse will be difficult for some of their listeners, and it is important that the listeners hear them acknowledge them and center them. J succinctly explains what will be covered during the segment, so that listeners can make an informed decision about whether they will continue listening to the episode. Queen vocalizes that the trigger warning is also triggering for her. This is important because she is refusing to have an objective distance from the topic. She is intentionally being transparent about how she was impacted as a survivor. Queen's vulnerability will hopefully resonate with the listeners who are triggered but feel empowered to push through those feelings and listen to the episode.

Queen's vulnerability, and J's support and thoughtful response, sets the tone for the remainder of the segment. It's also important to note that the trigger warning affirms that the episode is more than just entertainment for entertainment's sake. The hosts take responsibility for the effects that their episode may have and are careful to provide alternatives. Instead of opening the show with this conversation, they ease into it, and offer the trigger warning before they launch into the discussion. Queen also takes note to include the timestamps of when the conversation starts, so that those listening who do not want to continue with the segment can fast forward to the appropriate mark during the episode. The hosts are prioritizing their listeners' feelings even over having them listen to the episode in its entirety, which would be difficult to do on another media platform that relies on listeners or viewers interacting for the duration. The hosts acknowledge that there could be trauma in listening to the episode and are intentional about causing the least amount of harm to their listeners. Mouse Jones also offers a trigger warning on both

episodes and made sure to stress it on the episode with Dani Makeup as she details her abuse at the hands of Toure. Below is the trigger warning that Jones gave:

The Clubhouse with Mouse Jones

> Mouse Jones: I would want to give everyone who has dealt with sexual trauma or sexual harassment. I would want to give them a heads up that we do speak pretty in depth about what she had to hear and then endure during her time working with Toure. So I don't want anyone to get triggered. So if you are triggered by things like that, you should probably stop listening now. And also before we get in the episode, like I said on the prior two episodes, if you have been a victim of any type of sexual assault, whether it be in the workplace or at home, I want you to feel free to call the National Sexual Assault hotline at 800-856-4673. Once again, that is 800-656-4673.

The two trigger warnings serve the same purpose, but have subtle differences. Jones' trigger warning seems to be more matter-of-fact. It is still showing care towards the listeners who would benefit from the trigger warning, but since Jones does not identify as someone who has survived abuse, there is some emotional distance. Queen and J, both identifying as survivors[29], have firsthand experience with why the trigger warning would be necessary and their response reflects this. Hearing from actual survivors while discussing abuse is important because the power dynamic shifts. In speaking their own truths about the violence they experienced, they center themselves as survivors and give others a model of how to do the same. This is particularly crucial in discussions about abusers such as Kelly who hold power as celebrities and have been able to silence victims for decades through nondisclosure agreements, settlements outside of court and connections within the criminal justice system that help them evade any kind of

[29] J briefly discusses being a survivor in the episode but does not provide further detailed explanation in the way that Queen does.

accountability. In speaking up about their abuse, Queen and J empower survivors to decide if, and how, they want to engage with this content. Jones' trigger warning, while made with good intentions, does not center survivors' voices in the same way.

FIGHTING FOR THAT COUSIN WHO AIN'T GON FIGHT FOR YOU

Marsha's Plate

> Diamond Stylz: ...When you fight for Black men in the Black community--Black community too as a whole, not just Black men--it feels like you're fighting as an LGBT trans person, it feels like you're fighting for that cousin who, you know, is a punk ass bitch and ain't gon' fight for you.
>
> Mia: You know, if something happened to me, you would pay it dust. You ain't gon' be on the front lines at no protests. You're not going to organize. You're not going to do none of that shit.
>
> Diamond Stylz: But you're my cousin, and I don't want nothing to happen to you.
>
> Diamond Stylz: It's like, but I know if it can happen to you, it can happen to me cause I'm Black too. And so I can't not do it. And I think they take that for granted. So, and then I think Black men don't want to, they're just like White people. They don't really want to give up their power. So when they see something that's so blatant, I think they're just, there's some cognitive dissonance there, just like with White people. I think that it's just something that they see. The writing is on the motherfucking wall and they still can't read it.

Marsha's Plate, as a space that centers the voices of Black trans folks, brings a nuanced perspective and Black feminist intervention to the discussion around the docuseries and Kelly's abuse. Although the docuseries is presented from a heteronormative perspective, the *Marsha's Plate* hosts find several intersectional and nuanced similarities and ties to Black LGBTQ communities. In the above excerpt from the episode, the hosts discuss the pain in being excluded, as LGBTQ folks, from conversations around justice of all forms. Not only are they routinely excluded, but they

also continue to fight for justice on behalf of other Black people (particularly Black men whose murders by cops have been centered in these discussions at the expense of other victims). The hosts of *Marsha's Plate* illuminate the painful ways that some Black men participate in painful patriarchal oppression, at the expense of non-cisgendered, non-heteronormative Black folks. This adds a layer to the conversation happening on *Tea with Queen & J*. The "cousin that ain't gon fight for you" holds a special pain for Black LGBTQ folks, who then have to choose between multiple identities in deciding whose battle to fight. Are they going to side with Black men who have continuously excluded them in the name of homophobia or transphobia and in turn side with their Black identity, or will they prioritize their LGBTQ identity? Either choice is a hard one, and refuses to consider a nuanced and intersectional perspective of identity. Queen and J discuss the pain they feel at the refusal to consider Black women and girls as true victims, particularly when the abuser is a Black man like Kelly. The hosts of *Marsha's Plate* complicates this by including the exclusion of LGBTQ folks who have been abused, particularly by Black men like Kelly. Diamond Stylz, cohost of *Marsha's Plate*, further makes the connection between Kelly's abuse and LGBTQ communities in the following quote. (I'm including this quote in its entirety because of the profound points that Diamond makes):

> Diamond Stylz: So I remember looking back...a lot of the gay boys that I was in community with, they were in these weird, older gay male, younger gay male relationships where, you know, the older gay dude will buy them Jordans. They buy them the flyest ass clothes, but they will be getting something out of the situation and they will be grooming them. They will catch them, they will give them rides, they will let them use their car so they can flaunt at high school. They would be doing the exact same shit that R.Kelly did when he was engaging with

> um, these girls, they would be doing the exact same thing except for people, the culture, when they would talk about shit was wrong. When they would think something was going on, it just was totally ignored because this is some gay shit, abomination, wrong.
>
> And we're not checking up on the gay boys, the gay young dudes to protect them because you shouldn't be doing this gay shit anyway. So the only thing we're going to talk to you about is not about the predator trying to get you, but about why you need to not be gay. That's not what man is going to do. That's not what the Bible says. The Bible says, this is wrong. Sodom and Gomorrah. It's never about what immediate danger are you in, what immediate risks to trauma are you in. It was never about that. It was always about we are trying to fix you. We are trying to, um, fire and brimstone you, Bible thump you, all that kind of stuff. It was never the intent to save you from the predators because it was what it was. We don't know anything about the gay culture.
>
> We don't know how they maneuver in manipulating young boys into these transactional, um, relationships, um, how they manipulate that dusty little ni**a on the street who ain't got no money, who ain't got no family, who ain't got nobody that's taking care of him. So when you went out and bought this little ni**a some Jordans, he let me get in his booty. When I buy this little ni**ga the flyest clothes, he will suck my dick and fuck me down all night until I take him back home to wherever, his dope fiend mama who ain't taking care of him. You see what I'm saying? The male predators pick the most vulnerable females. The males on the gay side pick the most vunerable gay males as well.

In the above quote, Stylz discusses the layers of abuse that older Black queer predators enact on younger, vulnerable Black queer folks. She rightfully compares it to the abuse that the survivors discuss in the documentary. Many of them discuss how they had little family support, and the above quote echoes this. The grooming that Stylz discusses is also similar to grooming that Kelly's victims have discussed, particularly purchasing clothes and expensive shoes. Stylz' statement about the dismissal of the trauma that LGBTQ youth endure is similar to the pain that Queen discusses as she talks

about how no adults stepped in while she was out in public with her significantly older boyfriend while she was an underage teenager.

The podcast structure allows for these Black feminist and womanist interventions because it highlights communities that are not always given time in mainstream media. Not only do these episodes highlight the abuses they endure, but we get to hear from members of these communities themselves. We do not have to hear about them from a distance, as if we were watching an after-school special where we are educated about them. These episodes give them a platform to amplify their stories in spaces where they are centered, supported and loved. J does not interrupt Queen as she speaks. Instead, she listens, interjects when necessary and accepts critique when she falls short (i.e. referring to the tape as a sex tape instead of a rape tape). Stylz' two co-hosts also give her the space to speak and interject with relevant and useful stories.

'A Very Special and Necessary Episode'

The Clubhouse with Mouse Jones

> Mouse Jones: I would not be the person that I say I am. I would not be the person that people have believed me to be with wanting to see equality in protection of women, especially Black women, if I did not listen to this woman's story and give her the opportunity to tell her story as she asked. And so that's what I did. I gave her an opportunity to come on the show and speak her half and her side and say what she had to deal with. I hope I did that justice.

After Toure' appeared on Jones' podcast, a post to social media about the episode caught the attention of a woman named Dani Makeup. She commented on the image and called Toure' out for sexual harassment. Jones and Dani were familiar with each other, and he invited her on the podcast to share her story. This episode took place almost

immediately after Dani's Instagram comment, which signaled the urgency of her allegations against him. To Jones' credit, it would have been very easy to delete Dani's comment or shrug it off and not pursue what she was saying. Toure' had just appeared on his show, and he also repeatedly discussed how much he admired him and looked up to him as a budding journalist. But he did not delete the comment, and instead recorded an episode with Dani. Jones states that he reached out to Toure' before recording the episode, and Toure' acknowledged that Dani was telling the truth. Jones then states that Toure' says that he will follow up with a phone call, but does not do so.

Dani is a makeup artist who was hired to work on a show that Toure' co-hosted. She tells Jones that almost immediately, Toure' exhibits inappropriate behavior towards her. She emphasizes that he did this in front of multiple people on the set, who acknowledged that it is happening but shrugged it off since Toure' is the headline talent. Dani said that she became uncomfortable with the harassment to the point that she requested security to be in the room while doing Toure's makeup. When she would tell him to stop, she said that he would dismiss her concerns and say that he was just joking. Dani would eventually leave that job because of the harassment.

Several events happened leading up to her reporting him to the show's HR. She reported the harassment after quitting the show. Before she would report the harassment, Toure acknowledged his actions and apologized to her via an Instagram direct message. (He does not mention anything about this in the documentary or during the podcast episode with Lemieux and Jones.) Although she says that several co-workers told her that it wasn't worth it to report him, she decided to report him after seeing him do interviews

discussing #MeToo and Harvey Weinstein's abuse towards many people in Hollywood circles. She told Jones the following: "I was like, holy fuck, are you kidding me! Like you can't...that's the thing. Like people don't understand. Like the only thing I want him to do is just stop talking about sexual harassment. Literally, I don't want anything else from him. Like, that's it, that's it like, just that."

After seeing him discussing Weinstein without acknowledging his own abusive ways, Dani decided to report him to the show's human resource department. She says that from there, they moved quickly to fire him. Toure's statement from his rep, however, tells a different story:

> On the show, our team, including myself, engaged in edgy, crass banter, that at the time I did not think was offensive for our tight-knit group. I am sorry for my language and for making her feel uncomfortable in any way. As a lead on the show, I should have refrained from this behavior. I have learned and grown from this experience.

This statement contradicts everything that Dani tells Jones and other news outlets, and also differs from the tone of screenshots that Dani shared of their conversation. Toure's statement dismisses Dani's allegations about his behavior as something that everyone on the set did. According to him, there was nothing different (or wrong) about how he treated her, and he then places the blame on Dani for not being able to recognize this. The statement also does not acknowledge that he was terminated from the show for his actions. Lastly, the statement does not offer a public apology to Dani.

Dani tells Jones that after the private apology and termination of Toure, she didn't hear anything else from him. She assumed that this would be the end of Toure speaking publicly about the #MeToo movement. But then she saw him on the docuseries, and was

incensed. She would tell *Essence*: “I accepted his apology and was okay to move on, but you can’t be a sexual predator and go around shaming other predators.” If Toure’s presence on the documentary was the only representation we’d seen, then he would be presenting the image of a progressive ally who recognized that men do harmful things, particularly to Black women, and was calling out other men to do better. But this interview with Dani reveals that Toure’s “growth” did not actually involve a public reckoning with the harm that he’d caused.

> Mouse Jones: ...As you’re watching it, I’m guessing every time he comes on screen is a feeling.”
> Dani: “Do you know what I really thought of? I thought I felt so bad for the girl doing his makeup today.

The statement above from Dani is striking and sobering. She is insinuating that even though Toure had apologized to her for his behavior, she believes that he will continue to do harm, even while preparing to speak in a docuseries condemning a sexual predator. Dani’s concerns echo some of the bigger concerns raised within the documentary and the larger #MeToo movement. Many abusers are able to abuse, in plain sight, because of the power that they hold as celebrities with influence and money. Toure’ was previously fired for sexually harassing the person hired to do his makeup, and that same person had concerns about the person doing his makeup for a documentary about sexual abuse.

It is commendable that Jones brought Dani onto the show to share her story. I would not have learned about Toure’s abuse otherwise, as it was not made public before Dani outed him. As with the docuseries, a survivor’s voice was centered and prioritized.

This matters because it can encourage other survivors to speak up. Instead of shaming survivors, it shames the person who enacted the abuse towards them. Dani's interview provided a different perspective, one that had been downplayed in favor of Toure's presence within the docuseries. But it is important to note that once Dani's story was made public, this may have also triggered survivors who may have found comfort in Toure' as an ally.

In the next section, I'll discuss how the status quo was upheld in some of the episodes, even while important Black feminist and womanist interventions were made.

THEY WANTED TO BE PART OF THE INDUSTRY'

Although these podcasts have varying ideas and perspectives on Kelly, the one thing that they all have in common is that they are recording this episode and giving these critiques in the context of #MeToo and #MuteRKelly. In other words, they are offering critiques of an industry and a culture that did not operate from the knowledge that these movements bring. This is not to say that knowledge of abuse was nonexistent during this time, but moreso that popular opinions about abuse, consent, etc. are being discussed more frequently and fervently due to the popularity of these movements.

So what does this mean for the podcasts? What does this mean for Black culture and media? The responses presented in these podcasts present a case study of what it means to critique a culture that you were very much familiar with and participated in, to varying degrees of power and prestige. As evidenced by many of the testimonials in the docuseries, there can be no critique of Kelly and the culture that elevated him without

also critiquing one's own participation and complicity. These podcast episodes show people grappling with this, in real time. Nostalgia has become more and more popular as we celebrate things from the past. We see this happening with reboots of sitcoms past. But in embracing the past, we are also able to watch it with fresh eyes and different critiques naturally arise.

Tea with Queen & J

> J: And a lot of the folks you see in the documentary who were like participating in media back in the day, at that time, everybody who was there, like people were there, you know what I'm saying? People were there and the outrage was not there.
>
> J: And I wish that there was more discussion about the culture and how this was okay in society and how many people, including those who were invited to be interviewed, participated and were complicit in this.
>
> Queen: Because they wanted to be a part of the industry, because they wanted to be a part of White supremacist, patriarchal capitalism, in that way. And they felt that a lot of, I don't know, it's like it's as if they were mirroring what was already happening in the industry, as far as Whiteness is concerned. So this is just what it is. You know? So if I want this job at this magazine, I have to just shut up about that. I want this job at this record label, I have to just shut up about it. In my body this feels wrong, but I want this job and I want to be inside this industry. So I'm going to shut the fuck up, you know? And that's like power over them that I don't think that a lot of people are addressing or aware of.

In the above quote, Queen and J discuss the complicit nature of many of the folks interviewed in the docuseries. Many of their comments revealed the complicated ecosystem that existed to help Kelly commit many of his crimes over the span of multiple decades. The podcast hosts echo this same sentiment to varying degrees. The takeaway--examining Kelly's criminal behavior not only sheds a light on how abusive he was, but

also sheds an uncomfortable light at how complicit the rest of us were, as well. Kelly did not act alone, and many people in the media, especially, benefitted from his larger-than-life persona and his appeal as a sexual superstar. J's haunting words of "People were there, and the outrage was not there," is a chilling testament to what it means to look back at an uncomfortable period. To varying degrees, the hosts were active consumers of not only media and pop culture, but specifically, consumers of Kelly's music.

Queen complicates this further by discussing the benefit of being complicit and silent while watching Kelly commit these crimes. To borrow a statement that Toure' makes in the *Clubhouse* episode while discussing his infamous BET interview with Kelly after he was acquitted of child pornography charges, "It was the price of admission." The reward of complicity and silence is continued participation in the culture. Going along with the flow and turning a blind eye to Kelly's indiscretion, quite frankly, made a lot of people rich, in addition to of course Kelly himself. But at what cost?

The Clubhouse with Mouse Jones

> **Mouse Jones:** They come to you with this R. Kelly interview. What's going through your mind?
>
> **Toure:** I had been covering the R.Kelly story closely for a long time because I was at MTV news when we started to say: Did R.Kelly marry Aaliyah? I heard that rumor. We are newspeople. We don't just hear rumors, we have to go figure it out. And my editor, my producer told me call the Cook County records office and see if there's a marriage certificate. And it was the quickest and most delightful interaction with a bureaucracy I've ever had in America. She was very lovely and very quickly was like, Absolutely. Here you go, no problem. And like we had this marriage certificate and we put that out. And so just just knowing the story and following it for years of like, well this is never going to actually come to trial. And then it does.

Mouse Jones: And when you put that out, What is the goal behind it? Because I feel like...me just having super hope in humanity, right and feeling like there was a time where news was really news. Was it being put out to out him?

Toure: You don't do the news to make a point, right. That's what Fox does, picking and choosing different stories, exaggerating certain things, deemphasizing certain things for a particular narrative. That's being a hack.

Jamilah Lemieux: Or advocacy journalism. I mean, I think there's some times to say we're telling this story because...even think about what Rachel Maddow does. Yes it's I'm telling the truth. And it's not coming from a place of I'm biased, I'm a leftist, I have this agenda. But it's also still rooted in like what's going on right now in the country is very bad and you must know it.

Toure: I mean I can want you to know something without...I mean like, look we don't approach this story to say we want to take down R.Kelly or we want to hurt R.Kelly. We want to tell the truth, are they married or not. People are saying they are, we want to know what's really good. I was just part of that and I was following it. So. When it came time to do the BET thing I felt clear that there was a major problem here, and I could get him to talk about it in a way that would be...that would expose the truth. You know I'm not going to stand there and go, 'You raped that woman.'

The above quote from Toure is telling and a prime example of being complicit with Kelly's abuse. On the one hand, at multiple times during his career Toure had a hand in exposing Kelly's inappropriate and illegal relationships with underage girls. He was part of the MTV News team that first provided proof that Kelly, at 27 years old, married the late singer Aaliyah when she was 15 years old. He also infamously interviewed Kelly for BET years later, where Kelly would answer Toure's question of "Do you like underage girls?" with "How young we talkin'?" These separate media events were crucial developments in the Kelly saga because they were glaring evidence presented in mainstream media that Kelly had criminal and pedophilic tendencies. The marriage

certificate that Toure was able to procure proved that the "rumors" about the marriage were true, and more importantly, showed that Aaliyah's age was falsely listed as 18 years old. Later in the docuseries, it would be revealed that one of Kelly's staff members would help to secure the marriage certificate and was the one to falsify Aaliyah's age--a tendency that was shown throughout the docuseries and commented on by many of the hosts, that Kelly did not act alone. The BET interview, which happened after he had been acquitted of child pornography charges connected to the rape tape, solidifed that he was sexually attracted to children.

But in reflecting on his role as a journalist reporting on Kelly throughout the decades, Toure attempts to take a much more distanced and objective approach. When he says, "We want to tell the *truth* [emphasis mine], are they married or not. People are saying they are, we want to know what's really good," he's equating revealing the criminal activity of an (alleged) rapist to reporting on a regular day of entertainment. As J says while giving the trigger warning for the *Tea with Queen & J* episode, "This is not that type of entertainment." Treating the reveal of their marriage as just another piece of news was and still is very damaging but is an example of how the media continuously mishandled decades of glaring information about Kelly's actions and continued to praise him and help elevate his career.

It matters that Toure was able to find proof that Kelly illegally married an underage girl, who he actively labeled as his mentee and protege. R. Kelly is the self-

proclaimed "Pied Piper of R&B[30]." It also matters when he says, "You know, I'm not going to stand there and go, 'You raped that woman.'" Journalism prides itself on being objective and unbiased, so it is not surprising that Toure is taking this approach, even while reflecting on this interview over 10 years later. But objectivity has no place in discussing harm done to underage girls who cannot speak for themselves. Twice Toure was involved in reporting the illegal activities of Kelly involving underage Black girls, and it was considered fodder or entertainment as opposed to the devastating news that it was. The Black girls at the center of these stories were forgotten. Echoing Mouse Jones: "When you put that out, what is the goal behind it?" This is the guiding question of the podcast hosts as they look back at the media coverage of Kelly over the years. It can also be the guiding question as they reflect on the opportunity to do things differently within their own media platforms as they currently cover Kelly.

As podcasts are usually steeped in intimacy and deep conversation, there is an opportunity to lean away from objectivity. As there are no time limits on podcasts, and many tend to run well past an hour, the format lends itself to deep, and intense conversations, which are the perfect setting for reflection and reckoning. So it would make sense as a platform to provide space for the hosts to ruminate on the media's handling of Kelly.

In the wake of this reckoning, in the wake of the #MeToo movement, survivors

[30] The Pied Piper is a reference to the folklore in which a man lures children by playing music.

are being recentered in a way that only mildly happened in mainstream media before the #MuteRKelly movement really helped to amplify his abusive ways. So in shifting from a media perspective that dismisses claims against Kelly or at best, shrugs its shoulders, to one that is forced to reckon with a mountain of evidence and the testimonies from survivors, there is the lingering question of 'What now?' It would be a tragedy for the media to turn its back on these women who have so bravely been transparent about their abuse at the hands of a so-called legend and icon. What does a culture do with someone who has fallen from grace? What does a community do to make amends with the harm they've caused in supporting someone who has done so much terror to so many people?

One of the more important questions that each podcast sought to answer is how Black communities, media and pop culture can work to make sure this doesn't happen again. In other words, how can the culture protect and value Black women and girls in ways that it had not before? How can Black communities not elevate abusers at the expense of Black women and girls? There is no easy answer to that question. It is a complicated and messy question. There is no easy answer to that question. It is a complicated and messy question. But I do believe that the podcasts model what it looks like to openly grapple with this question, and what it looks like to examine what "the work" would look like.

Tea with Queen & J

> Queen: There are R. Kelly's songs and I would still dance to it. Like I would never, at this point now, right after the rape tape, I don't. still because.
>
> J: People still fucked with him for years.

Queen: Yeah. I have, you know, because there was like media amnesia one and then two, we live in a rape culture ass world. And it was just like, not that big, you know, eventually the shock wore off. Yup. So we get that and we're not, we're not like holding people to that standard. We didn't stop as soon as Aaliyah got out, as soon as that rape tape came out.

J: You and I, for example, you and I have been, it's been fuck R.Kelly for us for years, years, years. However it wasn't fuck R Kelly, as soon as it should have been. Like, you know what I'm saying? Like, like you said, we were still like fucking with a lot of that music back in the day.

J: Love a silly, good time. Okay. I was like, Oh, we shouldn't have been fucking with R.Kelly. And I think that that's the piece of it that's missing is that like communal responsibility. Um, and that lack of discussion about like, you know, like rape culture and that we all were there for all of this. And we did not hold him accountable as a community. And so many, the worst of us are still like, well, he wasn't charged. You know what I'm saying? Knowing that the criminal justice system is fucked up and a mess. And like, this is when we believe them. Okay.

Prioritizing the care of Black women and girls in the media can look like actively reflecting on the harm caused to them. In the following exchange, J discusses an instance when rapper Chance The Rapper, who is from Chicago does this in an interview with fellow Chicagoan Lemieux.

J: I saw on Twitter, they had a clip of Chance The Rapper and talking about, um, how he regrets working with R Kelly and the way in which black women are disregarded and mistreated. And he, because he felt like he didn't have enough evidence and didn't really, you know, believe what was happening. He realizes that he didn't believe it because they were black women and he didn't believe what black women have to say.

Queen: Um, and also I think it’s important to know that they're from Chicago. This is really important to know that they're from Chicago. And so like, there's a different kind of feeling and connection with R. Kelly, Um, versus maybe other black people from other cities, right.

J: And he says it in this very introspective way that he realizes that. And he's among, amongst a shitload of stars and celebrities and people throughout the

> industry, who have worked with him and not like thought anything of it. And so to see him there being introspective about what he did and why he did it. And he says it in a way to me, that elicits like he's remorseful for it. And he's not sugarcoating why. There are other people who would sit there and be remorseful and say, I don't know why, you know what I'm saying?
>
> Queen: We saw those people in the documentary.

The above sections shows the impact of reckoning with one's complicity in a culture and system that has routinely responded poorly to sexual violence (when there is even a response).

But these kinds of conversations, that invite reflection and genuine remorse, are an important step in the right direction. It is also important to hear what these conversations sound like--it is uncomfortable to admit complicity, it is uncomfortable to admit when harm has been done. As J states, their stance against Kelly has grown and evolved over the years, but it was not always their current stance. Holding space for people to reflect and ponder on how to do things differently was one of the shining spots of all of the episodes. The podcasters reflected on areas where the docuseries misstepped (such as including entertainers like Toure and radio personality Charlemagne tha God who have checkered pasts with sexual abuse allegations) and acknowledged that although what was acceptable has evolved over the years, accountability can still be expected. We see this when Mouse Jones gives Dani Makeup the space to share her story. In recentering the survivors, the podcasters present nuanced perspectives and conversations to a story that, at its core, failed miserably to do so for decades.

THE PODCAST WILL INTERVENE

The unstructured format of podcasts encourages the longform, intimate conversations that are key features of many podcasts. Florini (2015)[31] has noted that Black podcasts "largely eschew the "polished" and tightly formatted character of most mainstream corporate media, opting instead for an informal, flexible approach that allows for free-form conversation and embraces a range of Black vernaculars and accents" (p. 210). This intimacy was necessary in navigating the difficult conversations had on the podcasts. The intimacy and familiarity of podcasts have also led to the comparison of Black podcasts to social spaces such as barbershops and beauty shops (p. 210), where political and social issues are discussed in depth. Conversations in these social spaces, with Blackness centered, are often unfiltered and provide spaces for community members to reflect on issues of importance to Black communities. Black podcasts replicate this environment.

This unstructured format helped to strengthen the content of these conversations. With no time restraints, the podcasters were able to have honest and tough conversations. Reckoning with media both past and present is well-suited for a format that allows for longer conversations, as there is much to be explored.

In this chapter, I have explored how a burgeoning industry can reflect on the missteps of older media and learn from its mistakes to create inclusive media. It is my hope that in centering Black feminist media, other podcast scholars will consider the

[31] Florini, S. (2015) The "podcasting chitlin' circuit": Black podcasters, alternative media and audio enclaves." *Journal of Radio & Audio Media, 22*(2), 202-219.

ways that marginalized podcasters are using the affordances of the platform to speak back to mainstream media. In the age of reckoning--#MeToo, Time's Up and now #MuteRKelly, newer platforms like podcasts can learn from the silences of other spaces and refuse to give space to those who have inflicted harm. While reflecting, it is also important to note how these conversations progress: is there remorse and learning shown, or is it a refusal to acknowledge one's own complicity, as we saw with Toure's admission of his own sexual abusive past. Future research could also examine the show notes for each of these episodes, as they are important tools for the podcasters to intervene. Scholars could also examine the other segments of the episodes, as I only focused on the specific portions of the episodes that discussed Kelly and the docuseries.

I'll end this chapter with J's sendoff of their segment covering the docuseries: "We're going to take a deep breath. Oh, all right. We hope you took one with us. We love you. And yeah. Thanks for hanging out with us."

Chapter 5: Media From the Margins

During a Loud Speakers network podcasting panel that was aired as an episode for *The Combat Jack Show*, Premium Pete, a podcaster and regular on *The Combat Jack Show* discussed the reasons why he believed that the podcast market was not yet saturated. One of the main reasons, he argued, was that companies hadn't fully tapped into the advertising potential that podcasts bring. The other panelists, however, disagreed--the podcast market was completely oversaturated and they predicted that the trend would continue. This panel took place in 2017, months before the untimely death of pioneer podcaster Combat Jack, and right at the heels of the debut of Combat's groundbreaking longform podcast *Mogul.* If the podcast market was oversaturated then, what would these panelists make of the current podcast landscape?

The pandemic has greatly impacted the media industry as it figures out how to safely resume filming in-person. As a personal anecdote, it seems that one of the responses to this (and probably due to sheer boredom while in quarantine) has been an increase in the number of podcasts. I'm often overwhelmed by the amount of podcasts that pop up every day in my feed. I've heard on more than one occasion—"It feels like everybody has a podcast!" It really does feel like that, and I'm assuming that since podcasts can be recorded from anywhere, this has made podcasting an appealing alternative while an industry struggles to figure out how to pivot and recover from the pandemic.

We can look to the enormous growth that Spotify has seen with its dedicated investment in podcasts. The streaming service is fast becoming the leading podcast

company, competing heavily with Apple Podcasts. According to a December 2020 shareholders report, Spotify's podcast consumption hours among its users more than doubled from 2019. Towards the end of 2020, the company enabled podcast support to Google and Alexa devices, continuing to expand access to a variety of users. To Premium Pete's point, Spotify saw a significant increase in advertisement revenue, with podcasts growing over 100% from 2019. According to the report, "podcast performance benefitted from strong underlying demand from advertisers with a 50% increase in the number of companies spending in this channel vs. Q3" (Spotify, p. 4). Advertisers are finally paying attention to this growing industry.

I am concluding this research at an interesting moment--the pandemic is still very much ravaging on worldwide, but here in America, we are also rapidly moving towards reopening states across the country that have been closed as safety precautions. In a recurring cycle, we are experiencing "racial unrest"--rather, systemic oppression is being amplified in new ways for some people in the world. In this particular moment, Black lives are again centered and "matter." The global pandemic and racial unrest have upended life as we know it, and in its wake, requires a shifting lens of Blackness here in the United States.

This project has sought to think through how Blackness is produced, contested and performed within digital media, using podcasts as the object of analysis. Podcasts made in this current moment then, will serve as archives of what Blackness has meant and how has it shifted during this pandemic. I have argued that podcasts have served as a platform for new perspectives and voices to emerge, from "the last place they thought

of." Podcasts offer a new platform through which to continue the study of media made from the margins.

I began this project with the intention of studying a media that I love, and an industry that was experiencing fast-paced growth. In this particular cultural and political moment, it is important to continue building upon the quintessential question from Stuart Hall—'What is this 'Black' in Black popular culture?' It grew from a chance encounter with a podcaster who made me question, well, really, what *did* I mean by Black podcasts? For the sake of this work, Black podcasts have been defined as those who hold Blackness as a central cultural and political identity. This definition is intentionally broad to make room for the plethora of podcasts that fall under this category.

One of the central tenets of this project is building a framework that intentionally explores Blackness and digital media from a perspective that centers Blackness and is not concerned with the White gaze. I am interested in media from the margins and wish to grapple with how these podcasts subvert their marginalized identities and instead center them. These podcasts are Black podcasts--as opposed to solely podcasts--*because* they recognize their marginalized identities and center it as opposed to catering to a mainstream and White audience. Referring to them as simply podcasts does not reflect the work and labor that these podcasters have done to build communities that center those who belong to these marginalized groups.

The Black Joy Mixtape was chosen as the lens to think through what a Black feminist podcast could look and sound like. Each of the three episodes used the platform to make compelling storytelling decisions that reflected their Black feminist alignment.

Throughout each episode, an ethics of care was displayed. In addition to this, these episodes showed what it looks like to be in community with others and reimagine worlds together. These reimagined worlds, like the actual podcasts, are steeped in Black feminist thought and are being imagined particularly because of the hosts and guests' locations as Black feminists. They are speaking from "the last place they thought of," and in that place lies new imaginations and possibilities.

Unfortunately, the podcast is still on an indefinite hiatus. Their sharp and witty commentary is sorely missed. I found myself longing to hear what their perspective would have been during quarantine, and particularly during the 2020 election. They would have provided key analysis of the specific ways that the pandemic impacted Black women. What would they have said about the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol? The demise of this podcast is indicative of the struggles that independent digital creators face, with a lack of resources and institutional support.

Tea with Queen & J provided a Black womanist response to the podcasting industry, in the panel they curated with other Black feminist podcasters. In their work, Black women are centered, prioritized and their perspectives are privileged. These episodes provided an in-depth look into the experiences of several Black women podcast hosts, who are uninterested in catering to a White and patriarchal gaze. *Tea with Queen & J*, *The Black Joy Mixtape* and *Marsha's Plate* have served as models of media made from the margins.

Queen and J are podcast pioneers—their podcast began in the same year as the "podcast renaissance" (the same year that *Serial* debuted), and years later, the podcast is

still thriving. *The Reset* podcast is also still thriving. In February to honor Black History Month, host Laura Mignott amplifies her #29DaysofMagic Campaign, where she interviews a Black woman each day. Brooke DeVard, of the *Naked Beauty Podcast*, is also still creating beauty content. She continues to build community on Instagram through the Naked Beauty Planet page. DeVard says the following about the online community she's built: "My listeners are so interesting, and I wanted to get to know them and create a community with them as well, so I created Naked Beauty Planet on Instagram to continue a much more personal conversation beyond the podcast."[32] The Instagram page has over 21 thousand followers, and DeVard has also recruited listeners from the community to become contributors, as well.

QueerWOC, *Tea with Queen & J,* and *Marsha's Plate*, along with several other podcasts, are part of the "Baddie Brigade," a podcast collective made up of Black women that appear as guests on each other's podcasts and amplify each other's work. Nikeeta Slade, co-host of *QueerWOC*, unexpectedly passed away in May 2021. The news of Slade's passing was not the update I wanted to give for the podcast, but her voice and work will still live on through the archive of episodes of the podcast.

The podcasts chosen for the *Surviving R. Kelly* chapter all helped to provide a framework for simultaneously thinking through podcasts as archives and to examine the ways that podcasts can deeply grapple with accountability. In this case, the podcast as archive framework is useful to show reflections on an important moment in Black pop

[32] https://www.ipsy.com/blog/naked-beauty-podcast-brooke-devard-interview

culture. Future research could expand this to think through the other ways that podcasts archive cultural moments and shifts. Due to the niche nature of podcasts, there may be things covered on these shows that don't make it to mainstream media, which in turn makes these archives even more intentional and important. In thinking through the theme of "the last place they thought of," Black podcasts, and other marginalized media, as archive shifts the notion of what is important enough to be recorded and preserved. Whose perspectives are worth recording and saving?

CONTRIBUTIONS

My research centers the experiences and perspectives of Black women and queer folks within podcast studies and adds to the small but growing literature that focuses on Black podcasters. I focus on how Black feminist thought and Black queer identities inform the design, production and deployment of the podcast as Black public sphere. My research places Black and queer women at the forefront of podcast studies. A Black woman's standpoint centers the experiences of Black women, so by centering Black women in my research, we get a different look into the experiences of podcasters. With few exceptions, much of podcast research focuses on the actual medium, which is valuable and necessary work. But my research dives deeper into the cultural relevance and significance of Black podcasts.

One of the limitations of this study is the focus on Whiteness as a stand-in for mainstream media. Although Whiteness was not the central tenet of this project, there could have been more attention paid to not providing flattened out and hollowed

descriptions of White podcasts and media. This could be an area for future research, as well. Another limitation of this project is the lack of focus on audience reception. Audience reception is a crucial component of media production, as it gives insight into how the audience receives the podcasts, and whether this aligns with how the hosts intended. Unfortunately, I was not able to meet directly with the hosts. Hearing about their experiences directly from them as opposed to as participants on a panel, would have enhanced my analysis of their insight as Black podcasters.

FUTURE RESEARCH

It will be important to study the listeners of this media made from the margins. The statement that "Black people don't listen to podcasts" was never true and is especially not true in this current climate. A future audience study could provide a quantitative analysis of these listeners. We know that Black people listen to podcasts, but what else can those numbers show us? What else can they reveal? What other identities do they hold, and how does this impact how they listen to the shows? In this project, I have argued that my particular location as a Black feminist living in cities with small numbers of Black residents drew me to podcasts and has impacted the kinds of podcasts I listen to. This is one experience--how do other Black listeners consume podcasts? Are they also searching for Black voices to listen to?

The experiences of Black podcast creators are crucial to understanding the production and identity of Black podcasts. Although I was unable to interview any Black podcasters for this project, the episode that I chose for chapter 2 was a panel in which the

guests explicitly discussed their experiences as Black podcasters, which helped to provide insight. In the future, I'd like to interview hosts, producers, engineers, etc. to get a fuller understanding of the creation of Black podcasts and sounds.

In a podcast interview, scholar and podcast host Chenjerai Kumanyika shared that while recording an episode for his history podcast *Uncivil,* he got excited and let out one too many "Yeah!" in response to a riot/protest. His team gently suggested removing one of the ecstatic points, which Kumanyika felt was a natural response to a tense situation. These kinds of experiences are important to note because it references editing strategies that shape the tone of the podcast. What does the extra "Yeah!" signify? We need to hear the experiences of those involved in the production of these shows--the extra "Yeah!" may not have fit in with the message that the producer was trying to convey, or maybe it exuded a little too much Blackness for the imagined listener. The production of the show helps to craft the meaning of the podcast, as well.

In future work, I would also do an even closer listening of episodes from Black podcasts to provide a fuller look into the aesthetics of Black podcasts. Again, this is not to make the claim that there is one Black podcast sound--there is not. But what I am instead interested in exploring are the different ways that identity comes into play in developing Black sounds. Sounds are used to mark and signify as well, and I am interested in thinking through how this is done within Black podcasts.

THE PODCAST WILL INTERVENE

As podcasts continue to become a booming media platform, I am excited for what this means for the future of podcast studies. More and more scholarship is being produced that centers podcasts, and I am excited that my work will join this group. It is my hope that podcast studies will continue to be an interdisciplinary field. My aim for this project was to use an interdisciplinary lens to analyze podcasts. As I have argued, analyzing podcasts forces us to think differently. It forces us to *listen* more clearly, and to think through the ways that identity is performed sonically, and that will look differently with considering other disciplines. As a relatively new medium with the ability to shape and bend affordances, audiences, format, etc., there are so many directions that the study of podcasts can take. In studying podcasts and identity, there is much to consider in terms of language, podcasts outside of the global majority, class, etc.

More broadly, in this current cultural moment, there are so many directions that the study of Blackness can take. Our cultural understanding of identity, and specifically Blackness, has been shifting for some time. Companies are realizing--again--that diversity is profitable, that having a decided social justice commitment is beneficial for their brand and identity. Social media has allowed marginalized voices to be amplified and to rise up in ways that have serious implications for those that don't follow suit.

As researchers, we have the opportunity to also shift our methods, shift our objects of analysis and shift our perspectives. What could this mean for not only Podcast Studies, but for Black Podcast Studies or for Black Feminist Podcast Studies? As podcast studies grows and moves out of the infancy stage, it is crucial to include the study of

marginalized audiences and creators. We have to go to the last place we thought of, for there is magic happening there. Within the margins, we are able to get different perspectives of stories that we may have heard before, but not told in these particular ways. The podcast industry may be oversaturated, as stated earlier, but I believe that is one of the most beautiful elements of podcasts. Its ability to attract niche audiences means that yes, everybody has a podcast but also that everybody can (hopefully) find a podcast for them. Hopefully this means that we will continue to not only have diverse voices and perspectives, but more formats and genres emerging, more creative advertisements emerging--even potentially rethinking how media is categorized, how listener data is captured, etc.

It is my hope that my project has illuminated the innovative ways that the margins have shown that it has something to say. It's best we all pay attention.

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